



Sewell's



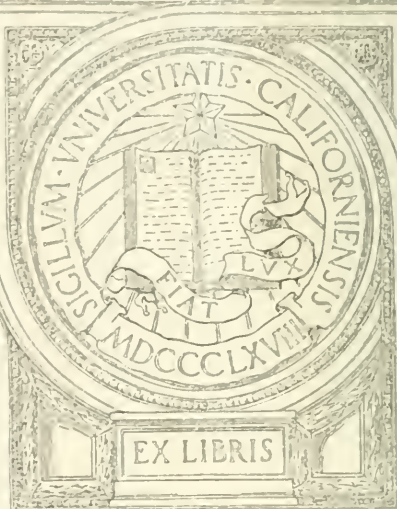
Tales

and Stories



Ursula.

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URSULA

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URSULA

A TALE OF COUNTRY LIFE

BY

ELIZABETH M. SEWELL

Come away : for Life and Thought
Here no longer dwell ;
But in a city glorious,
A great and distant city, have bought
A mansion incorruptible.

TENNYSON

NEW EDITION

LONDON
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1886



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URSULA.

CHAPTER I.

IT is pleasant to remember the events of years gone by. I shall try to recollect those of my own life. I may not be able to put down everything regularly, but some things that have happened cannot be forgotten, and these will help me to others. Mrs Weir was very kind in teaching me as she did when I was a girl. I suppose she never thought of the use I should put my learning to; and perhaps, after all, it may not be of use. I took little heed to advice which was given me when I was young, and so, perhaps, no heed will be given to me when I tell of my mistakes and difficulties. But time goes on fast, and I would fain, if I could, act up now to what Mrs Weir used to say, in her gentle way: 'Ursula, my child, we must do good in our generation.' God knows, I have done little enough in mine. I may not always have fallen short wilfully, but there is not much comfort in such a thought when one sees what has been neglected, except as regards one's self and the hope of forgiveness. Anyhow, I can but strive to make up for it, and the thought of having striven may be a comfort when I come to die.

I must begin at the beginning, the time which I can first remember. That was when we all lived at Sandcombe—my father, and mother, and William, and Roger, and I;—but I don't know much of those days. The farm must have been very different then from what it is now, and people's ways of going on must have been different too. I remember my mother always wore a cotton or stuff gown, with a coloured handkerchief folded over her neck, and used to get up at four o'clock in the morning, and

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help about all kinds of things which we should leave to the maids, and I can quite well recollect going out with her to see the cows milked, and her teaching one of the dairymaids how to churn the butter ; but almost everything else is gone from me, for I have known Sandcombe since, and so the notions I have of it are confused. My father and mother died when I was about six years old. My father was taken first ; he had been failing a long time : he caught a cold from being overheated at harvest, and never recovered it, and my poor mother took a fever soon after, and was ill for a month, and then she went too. It was a great grief to me, though I could not understand it properly. My mother was a very good woman, and taught me in the best way she could ; but she had never had much learning, and was always busy, and so I had been left a good deal to my own ways, and was spoiled and very headstrong. The only person who could manage me properly was my brother Roger, and I don't know how he did it, for he was never quick with me as William was, but somehow I loved him more than any one else from the time I was a baby. They used to say, that when I was in arms, if I cried, they always gave me to Roger to be quieted ; and I suppose the same feeling grew up with me afterwards : yet in those days I could not have known properly what there was to love in him, and there were some things about him which might naturally have frightened me. He was a very tall, large-made man, quite noted all round the country for his strength,—the best rider and cricketer to be found for miles. He had a power of work which was quite wonderful ; up in the morning with the labourers, and later to bed than any of us, and never seeming to want sleep as others did. His manner, though kind, was rough, and his voice was rather harsh. He spoke out his mind plainly when called upon, but at other times he was much given to silence. These things were not likely to win a child's heart ; but there is something, I am sure, which God gives to such little ones to teach them whom they may trust ; and so it was that not a baby ever came into the house but it would go to Roger at once. It was his fancy for children which they felt, I suppose, for he was curiously fond of them. He had a tender way, indeed, with everything which was put under his care, or made to lean upon him : colts, and kittens, and puppies were his delight, when he could not get hold of a child. It was such a pleasure to him, I imagine, to feel his own great strength by the side of their weakness. I don't think he was ever happier than

when he could take me up in his arms and carry me out to the yard, and set me on the back of one of the huge waggon-horses, and make it carry me round the field. He and the horse seemed to be so entirely of one mind; and when he saw I was not frightened, he would pat me on the shoulder, and say, 'There's a Trot!'—it was his pet name for me,—'she'll make a woman after all!' He had a great notion that women were not to be cowards, and I don't think I was a coward about anything but the dark; I never liked that. All this alone, however, would never have made me feel for Roger as I did when I grew up. But when I began at all to understand things, I felt that there was something about him different from most other people, beside his tender heart and his great strength. William was kind too, and a strong, bluff-looking man, with a hearty, good-natured manner; but the two brothers were quite unlike. In those days we did what is seldom, I believe, done now; we dined at the same time as the servants, in a little room opening out of the kitchen, which has since been altered. When William came in to dinner every one had to make way for him, and he had the best of all there was put before him, and nothing was thought of till he was cared for. It was all very proper, for he was the eldest and the master; but then he took it so much as his right, and never seemed to consider whether others were comfortable so long as he had what he wanted himself. But Roger never forgot any one. Before he sat down he had a kind word, though it might be rough-spoken, even for the little girl who helped in the dairy, and whom he never saw except at meal-times. He was a little hasty, and so was William; but Roger always said he was sorry, and William never did. They had different ways, too, of doing kindnesses; William made a fuss about his, and talked as if he was afraid they would be forgotten, but I don't think Roger ever knew when he was kind; it came to him as easily as eating or drinking. He was not, like some people, put out by being thanked, but he laughed as though it was strange to him that what he had done should be thought of any consequence. There were deeper things, besides, which made the difference,—things which I can see into now, though I could only feel them then. William would give out an oath sometimes, when he was very angry; but let Roger be provoked to the utmost, yet a bad word never passed his lips. He had the fear of God before his eyes more than any man I ever knew; not in talking,—he was shut up about religion to grown-up people,

and seldom came out about it at all, indeed, except to children,—but he made everybody feel it, in a way which was wonderful. When William had let out an oath, he would beg Roger's pardon, as though he had been a clergyman. After my mother's death, Roger was the person who took care that I should remember to say my prayers, and learn my Catechism. He was fond of reading himself, and liked to see me take to it, and when I was a very little thing, he used to hear me read a hymn on Sunday, and then, when I was older, a chapter in the Gospel, and when I had done, he would set me on his shoulder as a reward, and carry me round the kitchen. He was more my teacher in those days than any one. I had a kind of nurse to look after me, but she had work to do besides, and she was very ignorant, only a labourer's widow, who had never been to school. I might have grown up like a little heathen but for Roger, for I was so young, and so tiny of my age, that my brothers did not like me to go across the down by myself to school, either to Compton or Hatton; and Sandcombe was a very lonely place, there were no older children near who could take me with them. The plan was talked about sometimes, and the clergyman from Compton called several times, and said it would be a good thing; but William always put it off, and declared there was time enough before me. Thus I went on till I was nine years old, without having had any teaching except what I had learned first from my mother and then from Roger. But I knew a great deal, for such a child, about pigs, and horses, and cows, and dairy-work, and that might have been as good for me as books; for I had such a natural liking for learning, that when I was put in the way of it, I took to it at once, without any trouble, and the liking has stood by me all my life.

I lived at Sandcombe, never thinking of a change, for what child ever does think of it? Roger was all in all to me, and I had no thought of being parted from him. So it was, that it came upon me one day suddenly like a thunderbolt, that there was an idea of his leaving us. I don't think I quite believed it,—it seemed like an impossibility,—but it frightened me without my understanding it, and I jumped upon his knee (he had been playing with me just before I went to bed, and he was sitting inside the great open hearth in the inner kitchen), and put my arms round his neck, and said he was Father Roger and Brother Roger, and I would go wherever he went, and no one should take me from him.

I believe those words decided my fate. My father had died only moderately well off; he had his farm-stock, but not much else. All had been left to my mother, and after her to my brothers. I dare say it was intended to make some provision for me, but the business was put off and never done. William managed the farm for my mother whilst she lived. He and Roger were both a great many years older than myself. There had been a number of children between us, but they had all died very young; and I suppose this circumstance made me all the more a pet.

After my mother's death, William proposed to keep on the farm, and Roger stayed on for some time to help him, but somehow it did not quite do; William liked his own way and was apt to speak out, and Roger remembered (I know it, because he often told me of it in after years) that saying in the Bible, 'A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city;' and so he would not put himself any longer in the way of it, but proposed, instead, that there should be some equal division of the property made, and then that he should go forth to seek his own fortune.

That was quite Roger's fashion,—avoiding offence, he used to call it. Some persons said he was often unwise, and could not stand up properly for his own rights; and there might have been some truth in their words, but I loved him all the better for giving up, because it was so unlike what I should have done myself. Of all things I hated being put upon; and when I was a very little thing I used to strike my fist upon the table, and say 'You dare!' when any one offended me, and I might have gone on saying 'You dare!' till now, but for Roger.

William was honest and just in his ways, according to the world's notion of justice, and he and Roger settled their business very amicably, both of them agreeing that a portion should be set aside for me; and, no doubt, I was as well off as though the will had been made out by a lawyer.

When William put his name to the agreement, he said out strongly (so Roger told me afterwards), that the child should never know want whilst he had a penny to give her. It was very kind of him. I dare say he talked more than Roger, who said little about things he cared for.

They put aside two hundred and fifty pounds for me, and then Roger and William divided the rest.

And now Roger meant to leave Sandcombe. William intended

to marry as soon as he could, for he said he should never manage without a 'missis' to look after things. As for me, there was a notion of sending me to school. We were about eight miles from Hove, the market-town. It was a very good-sized, flourishing place, and there were decent schools in it: one was kept by a cousin of my mother's, and it was thought that I should do very well there. I was to come back to Sandcombe for the holidays, and William hinted that by and by, when he had a 'missis,' I might return and live there entirely.

Roger had sometimes thought of going to Canada, and setting up for himself there as a farmer; and no doubt he might have done very well. But then he could not possibly have taken me too; and seeing me so bent upon staying with him, he began to think of something else. I fancy also it came across him that I might have a doubtful kind of life with William and his wife. William was all for this world,—making money; not dishonourably, but still making it,—and he had his eye (Roger knew this) upon a hard kind of young woman living at Hatton Farm, two miles from us, whose father was said to be very well to do in the world. Leah Morris was her name. Roger never liked her, and she never liked Roger. I don't think he took kindly to the notion of my being left under her.

He kissed me very much when I clung to him that night, but he made no promises; only he whispered, 'Ursie, little one, we will do what God tells us;' and then he bade me go to bed, and I went and cried myself to sleep.

I did not see Roger again till the next day at dinner. He was out to work too early for me; but I always dined with him and with William in the little parlour. The farm servants sat at a long table in the kitchen, and we in the inner room could see all that went on. William was very strict with his servants; he kept them all in excellent order; and treated them very fairly. They had good food, and enough of it. Sandcombe bacon had quite a name in the country; and the cheese, though it was so hard that it almost required a hatchet to cut it, had a very good flavour when it had been kept a little while; and some of our friends at Hove used to have a present of a cheese made them once a year, they were so fond of it. It was a pretty sight enough to see the dinner. The inner kitchen was much higher than the rooms that are built in these days. It had a great oak beam going across it, and there were odd things hung about the walls,—a pair of stag's horns, and some guns, and an old leathern jack, such as people

used to drink out of in very old days; it was given to my grandfather, and was very much prized. And all the pots, and pans, and dishes were kept bright and clean, and the stone floor was constantly swept and scrubbed. It was a very bright kitchen in summer, when the sun came in, in a kind of dancing way, through the leaves of the clematis, and the virginia creeper, which had been trained up the divisions of the windows. But I liked it best in winter; when the flames of the wood-fire in the open hearth made the near part of the room look as if it was coloured red; whilst out in the corners there was a kind of goblin darkness, even in the day-time. Sometimes, when it was very cold, I used to beg to have my dinner by the kitchen fire, and then I took a little wooden stool quite inside, under the black walls of the hearth, and sat snugly with my plate in my lap, and the servants turning round to look at me, and asking if I was comfortable, and trying to entice me out to their table. That was all very happy. I felt myself to be cared for by every one. But, on the day I have mentioned, I had no wish to go to the kitchen hearth, though it was very cold for the spring season. I kept close by Roger in the little parlour, and said nothing; the sight of him made me ready to cry. What he had said about going away came back to me so sadly. He and William sat together after dinner with their pipes, as was their custom. William wished me away, I suppose; for I know that when I took my doll to play with, that I might have an excuse for sitting by Roger's knee, he said sharply, that I must be off to the kitchen, I was only in the way there: and I ran off, half angry, half sorrowful, and told Deborah, the kitchen girl, that I was come to help her to put away the things; but all the time that I was carrying the plates into the scullery, I was watching William and Roger, for I was quite sure that they were talking about something which concerned me.

And so, sure enough, they were. It was a very long conversation; and Deborah, who was rather given to be pert, said to me, that she thought master had forgotten there was any work to be done in the world, he spent so much time over his pipe; but they both came out of the parlour together at last; Roger looking very brimful of something important; and before I could speak, he caught me up in his arms, and said, 'Well, Ursie, what do you say? will you go with brother Roger to live at Dene?'

I don't know what I answered, for I scarcely knew what he

meant : but my heart seemed to leap up into my mouth for joy, and I kissed him a great many times ; and he was in such spirits, he put me on his shoulder (for I was very small, not much bigger than many children of six), and carried me across the room as he used to do ; whilst Deborah screamed with fright, and William told him he ought not to make a fool of himself.

I did not understand why we were to live at Dene till a long time afterwards, and then no one told me exactly, but I learned about it by degrees.

Dene was a gentleman's house lying under the down which rose just behind Sandcombe. The two places could not have been more than three-quarters of a mile apart ; but I had not often been close to Dene, for whenever I went away from the farm, I used almost always to go over the down to Compton, or in the opposite direction along the ridge to Hatton, those being the two villages nearest to us.

The family at Dene were only there every now and then, and we had nothing to do with them, for they kept cows, and poultry, and pigs for themselves, and we sent all ours to the market at Hove.

But just at this time, it seemed, Mr Weir wanted to make some change in the place, and had an idea that it would be a good thing to have a respectable head man living there, who might look after the cottages belonging to the estate, and also superintend things about the grounds ; and searching about for such a person, he heard of Roger, and made him the offer of going there.

It was not quite to Roger's taste. He had been used to a farm, and to more freedom in his ways. Though William often spoke out to him when he was angry, it was not like having a master over him. He could answer again, if he liked it : not that he ever did ; but there is a comfort—I have found it myself—in feeling that one might answer if one chose. Now Mr Weir had the character of being a stern, fidgety man, and Roger was likely to have a good deal of trouble, and perhaps not to please him after all ; though, if he could not, I don't know who could. But then, on the other hand, there was no risk. He would have a fixed sum, and a house to live in, and a home for me. That told with him more than all the rest. He would be able to keep a girl to look after me, and I might be taught to read, and write, and cypher, at Compton School, and

he would have me always with him. It might not have been a very wise reason for Roger's choice. Perhaps it would have been better for me to have been sent to people who could have kept me more strictly; but I suppose there was something in the feel of my arms round his neck, and the many kisses I gave him, which touched him and made him think, as he said, that God had given me to him, and he could not part with me. I have felt in that way myself in after years, when a child has seemed to love me very much. People say it is a woman's weakness, but I think men have it oftener than they choose to own.

What went on after that I do not at all recollect, though I know it seemed to take a long time to settle everything. William and Roger had a great deal to manage with the farm, and questions about money to arrange. After some talking, it was decided that some of Roger's money should be left with William to lay out upon the farm, and that he should have good interest for it, and be able to claim it again, after due notice, whenever he wished. It seemed the best plan for the time; and William was very trustworthy. Roger had an additional reason for being prudent, because he was to take charge of me, and he wished to put by my little money for the time when I should be grown up, and keep me himself now out of his own. There was no actual right in the matter, not what the world calls right; yet I have always felt that the fair way would have been for William to have helped. But he never said anything; he seemed to take it for granted that Roger would manage it all comfortably. He had a fashion of letting his own share of a burden fall upon another person's shoulders, and never appearing to think that he was bound to assist in carrying it. And because he kept so aloof, people imagined at last that he had nothing to do with it. I don't think it ever entered Roger's head that he was undertaking more than his share in paying all my expenses; and I am sure that William never thought himself anything but a most excellent brother.

CHAPTER II.

WE walked over to Dene late one bright summer's evening, about two months after the plan had been first talked about. I just remember that. I don't recollect what the country looked like; but it must have been very beautiful if it at all resembled—as of course it did—what I have known it since.

The down behind Sandcombe is a long ridge, as I have said; but towards the south it rises up in a great hill, called St Anne's Hill, from the summit of which there is a view for many miles round, over the land and over the sea; for it is very near the sea, not above a mile distant. The coast forms part of a great bay, indented by smaller ones. The shore is closed in with red sand-cliffs, rather low, broken, and jagged; but away to the west the red sand changes into chalk, and the cliffs become very steep, and rise to a great height; standing out against the sky, when the sun shines on them, until they almost dazzle the eye; and at other times covering themselves, as it were, with a bluish veil of mist, and looking out proudly from behind it. I always liked the white cliffs very much, yet my eye never rested upon them long, but wandered still farther, to a distant stretch of gray land, looking like a cloud, which could be seen just where the sea and the sky met. It was an island very far off. The shepherds on the down, I have been told, often watch it to see whether it is clear or misty. Whenever it is seen quite plainly, they say there is to be a change of weather. That was not my reason for gazing upon it as a child; but it was a spot which I could not reach, or hope to reach, and I had notions of a life there which should be quite apart from trouble or care, and in which I should have the rule, and make every one happy; and so it was the land of my day-dreams.

Below the ridge of Sandcombe Down the ground is very flat for a long way. From the edge of the cliff it is level for miles, cut up into corn-fields and pastures, with a few trees dotting the hedge-rows. People have said that it is a barren-looking country, and wants wood, but it was never barren to me. There was always variety in it. The clouds, when they drifted over the sky, cast shadows upon the fields; and the sun, when it burst out, gleamed across them in long streaks of light; and sometimes touched the tower of a church, or seemed as if it were trying to light up the old castle, standing on the hill close to Hove. For

we could see as far as Hove, and beyond it, from Sandcombe Down : away, indeed, to where the river, which had its source close to us, and was then only a tiny brook, became quite a broad stream, and deep enough to float vessels. We could follow it till it reached a little seaport a few miles from Hove, and trace beyond it a blue line of sea, appearing here and there, as the land rose or sunk. There was an opposite coast, too, in that direction, and we could plainly distinguish the houses, looking like white dots, and the great chalk-pits, like patches on the sides of the misty hills. I was never tired of the view ; yet it was not so grand as the open sea, and the white cliffs from St Anne's ; and I think it gave me more thoughts of the world. It made me picture to myself men, and women, and all their cares and troubles, and hopes for things which belong to earth ; but the sea seemed to have come at once from God, and to belong to Him alone. When human beings passed over it, they left no mark behind them. One view was like time and the other like eternity. In former days there had been a little chapel on St Anne's Hill ; an oratory, I believe, it was called. It was connected with some old ruins in Compton village, which are now built into barns and granaries, belonging to the Abbey farm. I have been told that some one of the monks who lived in the abbey used, in old times, to be sent to the chapel on St Anne's to say prayers, and to put lights in the tower as a warning to the vessels when they came too close to the shore. In after years a regular lighthouse was built there, but it has fallen quite into decay. It was not worth while to keep it up, for thick mists from the sea often rest upon the Hill, and in the stormy night the gleam from the lighthouse could seldom be seen. Only the stones scattered upon the green turf, and a portion of the lower walls, remain ; and a gooseberry bush, which grew in the little garden belonging to the lighthouse, is the sole mark that any care had ever been taken to make such a place habitable. But the eight-sided tower of the oratory stands as firm as ever,—the walls dark gray, and brown, and green, where lichens have covered them ; whilst the foundation of the chapel can also be traced without difficulty. I have heard people wonder, as they talked about the oratory, what could make any person content to live there ; and I have heard them say, too, that there was much evil in the days when it was used, and that we are more enlightened. I dare say they are right. I am very thankful for the blessings granted me, and I would not, for all the world, go back to

times when I could not read my Bible for myself ; but I can never think that the watchers in the oratory kept less guard upon their lights, because they knelt by them and said their prayers ; and I have myself rested against the wall, on the steep side looking over to the sea, and prayed with a deeper feeling, because I felt that the spot was like a church, and had been made holy by the devotion of those who had stood there before me.

But I must not linger so long describing Sandcombe Down, and the view from St Anne's, only they are mixed up with so many things which happened in my childhood, that it is a pleasure to me. The evening that I walked over to Dene with Roger, we turned quite away from St Anne's Hill, and went to the other end of the long ridge, towards the north. That, too, was a marked spot, for a stone pillar had been placed upon it to note the visit of a foreign emperor to England. I had sometimes been as far as the pillar when I went over the ridge to Compton, or came back from it ; but I was always stopped there by Mr Weir's grounds ; for just above Dene the side of the down was very steep, and formed a deep hollow, which Mr Weir had planted thickly, making winding walks among the trees, and separating the plantation from the down by a light iron fence.

A broad, smooth, sloping path, cut along the side of the hill, in the green turf, was the nearest way from Sandcombe Farm to Dene. Furze and beautiful red foxgloves grew there in plenty ; their look, and something in the scent, will often come before me even now, and make me feel as if there must be something young in me which can never die. Perhaps it belongs to that part of myself which is to live again in heaven. This path went very gradually down the side of the hill, and then a white gate gave admittance to the grounds of Dene, and to a broad road at the foot of the plantations, which led by the back of the house to the entrance.

Other things have become clouded in my memory, but I can quite remember my feelings as Roger opened the white gate, and said, ' Now little one, we are at home.' I had a fancy that the whole place belonged to us, that we were in some way raised in the world, and yet I looked round with a grave wonder, and kept close to Roger's side, fearful that I might be trespassing if I went a step to the right or the left. The word trespass was a very awful one to me. I had seen it set up on boards in Mr Weir's plantations, and it was mixed up in my mind with visions of a dismal dungeon, and bread and water.

Roger went up to the house-door and rang at the bell. A girl answered it, and then there came out a stout, old lady, dressed in black silk, with a very gay cap on her head : as grand as a queen she seemed to me. She patted me on the shoulder, and spoke civilly to Roger. He went aside with her, and they talked for some minutes. I thought at first she must be Mrs Weir herself, but as we turned away to go a little further down the carriage-road, Roger told me that she was Mrs Mason, the housekeeper, who had the care of everything in the house, as he was to have the charge of everything out of it. I found afterwards that Mrs Mason lived there, more that she might have a home, being an old servant of the family, than for any other reason.

The stables were very near the house, on the opposite side of the carriage-road. They, and the coach-house, and a kind of a barn, in which things could be stored away, being all built of good stone, formed quite a grand set of buildings. There was a large clock over the coach-house,—very much needed, for Dene was a most out-of-the-way place. Compton was three miles off by the road, though only a mile and a half by the cart-track over the hill ; and that was only a village. It had no shops nor anything of that kind. The nearest gentleman's house must have been four or five miles distant from Dene ; whilst Hove, which was the only place we could get anything from, was seven miles off : so there was great need of the clock to keep us all regular and punctual.

Next to the coach-house, joining it indeed, but nearer to the house, a set of rooms had been built, and these we were to have. I cannot say they were anything very grand. Certainly they were nothing like the farm-kitchen at Sandcombe. They did not look as if they belonged to a regular house ; and I could not understand what Roger meant when he opened the door, and went into the little kitchen, and sat down in an arm-chair, looking round him half sad and half pleased. I asked him where we were to go next.

‘No farther, Ursie ; this is home. We'll be very jolly here, little Trot.’ And then he took me upon his knee, and covered me with kisses. I don't think he liked me to see his face. He must have thought a good deal of Sandcombe, and my father and mother, and old times, and it was very solitary for him. I was no companion, though he did love me so dearly.

The next day a girl was to come to look after me, but there

had been some mistake about the time, and she was not there to meet us. Because of this we were to go over to the house and have our tea with Mrs Mason. So when Roger had unpacked some of the things, and I had tired myself with running up and down the steep flight of stairs to look at the bedrooms, we went across to the house. I should say first, however, that we had a very comfortable lodging upon the whole. Besides a tidy parlour, a kitchen, and two bedrooms, and a closet in which another bed could be put, there was a little room within the kitchen, where a servant might sleep if it was necessary. But the plan was for the girl to come for the day only, as she lived at a cottage quite close ; so the kitchen room was only likely to be used as a place for lumber.

Neither water nor soap had been provided for us, and we went across to the house just as we were when we came from our walk. I did not think of such things, but Roger did. He was wonderfully neat in his ways for a man who had so much rough work to attend to. He resembled my mother, who was famed for tidiness and cleanliness. I dare say, too, he knew what Mrs Mason would like, for we were no sooner inside the house, than she took me up-stairs to her bedroom, a very comfortable one, near the kitchen, and made me put myself to rights, and wash my hands and face before we went down to tea.

We had our tea in the kitchen. Mrs Mason had a little sitting-room to herself, but it was very small, and so, indeed, was the house, though it appeared grand enough to me just at first. Mr Weir only used it for a few months in the autumn, when he came for shooting, and there were not many contrivances for comfort in it, and very little space for servants. But I knew nothing about such matters that first night, and only felt it to be very strange and pleasant to be sitting by Roger's side, eating lard cake, drinking tea out of pretty brown cups with gilt edges, and able to watch Mrs Mason, as she sat before the tea-board, in her black silk dress, looking grander than ever.

Roger and Mrs Mason talked about a great many things which I did not understand, and their tea lasted much longer than mine ; but when I was tired of sitting up and listening, they let me get down by the hearth, and play with a tabby kitten, and Mrs Mason made the girl bring a cork and string, and tempt the kitten to run after it. I did not remark anything that went on, till I heard Roger say, 'I never knew that both the ladies were coming.' That made me attend. I don't know why. I could

not think who the ladies were, and I was always rather curious. Mrs Mason looked grave and odd, and answered, 'Yes, both of them. Miss Milicent used to say she didn't like the place, but she has turned quite round now. She's a queer one. You may thank your stars, Mr Grant, that you are not likely to have anything to do with her.'

I think Roger must have noticed my eyes fixed upon him, for he stopped suddenly as he was about to reply, and said, 'It is nearly the little woman's bed-time.'

'Ah! yes, to be sure;' and Mrs Mason called me to her, and asked if I was sleepy.

'No,' I said, quickly: 'Why does that Miss come here?' A fit of laughter followed, and something was muttered about 'little pitchers and long ears;' but I was not to be daunted, and I asked again, 'Why does that Miss come here?'

'Because it's her home,' said Roger, very gravely; 'but little children must never trouble themselves with what doesn't concern them:' and I asked no more, for his look showed me he was not pleased. He said I must go over to the cottage to sleep; but Mrs Mason interfered. No one was there to put me to bed, she said, and nothing was ready for me; she could not be sure even that there were sheets in the bed; for Fanny (that was the name of the girl who opened the door for us) had been so busy, there had not been time for her to go across and see about it. It would be much better for me to sleep at the house; there was plenty of spare room.

Roger objected because of the trouble, but he was soon overruled. Mrs Mason liked children, and was very good-natured; so she called Fanny, and told her to take me up to the little back room and put me to bed.

'Miss Milicent's room, ma'am, did you say!' asked Fanny, who was rather deaf.

'Miss Milicent's room, child! What are you thinking of? The little back room—the peacock room. You know what I mean. Miss Milicent's room, indeed!' I heard her murmur to herself, 'there would be a fuss!'

Fanny carried me off to bed. I whispered to Roger, as I said good night, 'Please come and see me after I'm in bed.' He was going to say no. I suppose he thought he had no business to go about the house as if it was his own; but Mrs Mason promised me he should, and I went away happy. Roger's last charge being that I should remember to say my prayers properly;

and then he would hear me repeat my verse before I went to sleep.

Fanny took me through a short passage into a little hall, then up some narrow, winding stairs to a lobby, with several rooms opening into it. The first on the right hand side was the peacock room.

It never entered my head to ask why it was so called ; but, full of my curiosity, I chatted away to Fanny about Miss Milicent all the time I was undressing.

I learned that she was Mr Weir's daughter, which sounded strange to me, for I thought that Milicent was a surname ; but I found afterwards that she was called Miss Milicent because there was a cousin who had more right to be Miss Weir.

I was informed also that she had a mother but no brothers or sisters. Miss Weir, the cousin, Fanny said, sometimes came to Dene but not often. This cousin I cared very little about, especially when I heard that she was not expected now, and might never come again, as she was engaged to be married to a Mr Temple ; but I made Fanny tell me what kind of person Miss Milicent was, and when she said 'grumpy,' I was nearly as much in the dark as before. I only guessed it was something disagreeable ; and I mixed up Mr and Mrs Weir, and their daughter together, and fancied them all like the ogres I had read of in fairy tales. I should have been frightened and unhappy, only I was sure that Roger was a match for them all.

He came to me as he had promised, and I repeated my verse to him, and then he kissed me and said, 'God bless you, my little Ursie,' and left me. I listened to his heavy tread as he went down-stairs : and when all was silent I turned and tossed in the large bed, not daring to open my eyes lest I should see the darkness, and wishing very much that I had been allowed to sleep in the little room at the cottage close to Roger. But I fell asleep at last.

A strange noise woke me very early in the morning ; a harsh, scrooping sound, which amused, and yet a little frightened me, and made me sit up in bed to listen. When I could not understand where it came from, I jumped up and ran to the window to look out. A light fence of trellis-work was just below,—a screen for a little area in front of the pantry,—and on this trellis-work roosted a peacock and peahen. My delight ! how can I possibly express it ? There they sat, the peacock proudly turning his beautiful purple neck on all sides, and his long tail, spotted

with glittering eyes, drooping over the fence ; and the peahen looking so quiet and gentle, and beautiful too, only seeming not to wish to be noticed because she had such a grand companion. I believe I screamed with delight, I was told so afterwards ; and Fanny always declared that I begged to be allowed to open the window, and pull only one feather out of the peacock's tail, for he had so many I was sure he would never miss it. I know myself that the peacock and the peahen seemed like the fairies of the place to me then, and for years afterwards ; and even now, if I could have money to throw away upon fancies, I should be tempted to have some always with me, in the hope that they might bring back the feelings of unbounded gladness, which are by this time almost forgotten.

It was a sunshiny morning the first day at Dene. Roger went out directly after breakfast to his business of looking after things, and I was left with Mrs Mason and Fanny. For that one day I was to run about and do as I chose ; but Mrs Mason put on a grave face as she said that idleness was not good for little girls ; and it was settled that Roger was to take me over to Compton the very first day he could spare the time, in order that I might have my name put down for the school.

Mrs Mason made me help Fanny wash up the tea-things when breakfast was over ; and then she said we might go round the garden, only Fanny was to take particular care that I did not tumble into the pond. So Fanny and I went forth together, first, however, running all over the house, and peeping into every nook and corner, even into Miss Milicent's room, which was nothing remarkably different from any other, except that it was the largest, and had the prettiest view. Fanny said that Miss Milicent always had the large room because of her boxes.

The house at Dene had been first a labourer's cottage ; that was before Mr Weir took a fancy to come there for shooting. He built two rooms, a dining-room and a drawing-room, not at all large, and rather square, only with a kind of bow for the window. These rooms were on each side of the little passage or hall, and there were no more sitting-rooms in the house, at least, when first we went there. Miss Milicent's room was over the drawing-room, and Mr Weir's over the dining-room ; and there was another room, which was used as a dressing-room, besides the peacock room and some attics ; that was all the house then, except the chambers over the kitchen, where Mrs Mason and Fanny slept. The attics were what I liked best ; we had to go

up such a droll little staircase to reach them, and they had such a beautiful paper, a kind of Chinese pattern, with a bridge and some houses, and little men and women going over the bridge. They, too, like the peacock, were part of the fairy things belonging to Dene, and I seemed to have more to do with them than with Mr Weir and Miss Milicent. The attics opened upon the leads of the house, and the peacock had been up there and left behind him one of his small feathers—not one with an eye, but with a soft feathery fringe—such a purple green! there is no colour like it elsewhere that I have seen. Fanny crept out of the window and brought it back to me, and I have it now. Unless it was a duty, I would not part with it for any sum of money.

Going over the house was very pleasant, but it was nothing to the garden; and when Fanny opened the front door, I rushed out wild with delight, and scarcely heeding her as she called to me, in a frightened voice, not on any account to run so fast, or I should be in the pond.

Dene stood very high. The ground sloped directly from the house, but there was a broad pavement in front, covered by an open verandah, which had been made by a very old man, a country carpenter, and was esteemed quite a wonder, for its pretty patterns and crossings. The house would have been homely-looking on the outside, except for the verandah; but that gave it a look unlike other places, and the arches made a separate frame for each portion of the country that was to be seen from it.

The view from the house, like that from the down, might, I suppose, have been called wanting in wood; but paradise could scarcely have been more lovely to Eve, when she first opened her eyes upon it, than Dene was to me on that summer morning, and many, many others which followed. It looked to the east, and the sun, therefore, shone full upon it. The turf was smooth as a carpet of velvet, and not a weed was to be seen in the bright flower-beds. In the centre of the lawn a fountain, which the gardener set playing to please me, rose up like a silver thread into the air, and in the pond round the fountain, bright gold-fish floated about, catching at the bread crumbs with which I was allowed to feed them. Another pond, with an island in the centre, and a walk round it, was to be seen still lower, but it was always a place of mystery to me. I never reached the island, though I always longed to do so. Beyond the garden lay an ex-

panse of country, such as could be seen from the down. It had one or two marked spots, an old manor farm, surrounded by trees, nearly opposite to Dene, and a church on a bit of rising ground, and a zigzag road across a moor—part of the high road to Hove; and immediately opposite was a ridge of hills, very like Sandcombe Down, with what was called a semaphore at the top. I believe it was used for making signals about ships to persons a good way off. It was a view in which there seemed always something new to find out; and especially I used to please myself on Saturdays, when Roger was gone to Hove, by watching the carts, and waggons, and horses moving like dots over the zigzag road, and guessing which might belong to him. But that is going on beyond my first morning.

Fanny led me all round the garden, and then, as we came back, she stopped at the foot of a steep bank covered with shrubs, which parted the grounds of Dene from the down, and pointing to a flight of rough steps, said I might go up there if I liked. I ran before her, scarcely contented to make use of the steps, but every now and then scrambling up the bank, till I reached the top; and there I found a seat, and a little wicket-gate, opening upon the carriage-road close to the down. Crossing the road, Fanny made me enter the plantation, which, as I before said, filled the hollow of the hill behind the house. We went on and on along narrow, winding paths, sometimes stopping to rest upon a bench under a tree, sometimes going quite to the edge of the bank, to look down through the mass of branches, and leaves, and flowers, which seemed to sparkle like emerald and silver, upon a green field just at the bottom of the plantation, in which Mr Weir's cows were feeding; and then we ran on again till we came to a little summer-house—a real house, with a table, and some wooden chairs, and a tiny fireplace; so cool and pleasant-looking it was!—but we could not go in, for Mrs Mason kept the key, but Fanny lifted me up that I might peep in at the window.

It was all more happy to me far than words can tell, but I can never by description make other people feel the same. Fanny, though she was not much more than a child, seemed to care little about it. All that she appeared to think of then, or afterwards, was the gossip about the few people who lived in the neighbourhood. We passed out of the plantation by clambering over an iron fence, and came round to the house in a different direction, across an open bit of pasture land, which seemed once to have

formed part of the down. There it was that Fanny was induced to stop, that she might point out the cottage in which Sarah's father and mother lived. Sarah was the girl who was to take care of me and cook our dinner and make our beds. They were labouring people, she said, and they were very glad to get Sarah a place. Sarah was to have gone to the gamekeeper's, but his wife had a cousin who was come to help. And then she led me a few steps on, that I might look at the gamekeeper's nice cottage, with its strip of garden so neatly kept. The gamekeeper's wife, she said, had had some tiffs with Miss Milicent, but that was no wonder. Fanny did not think proper, however, to tell me what the tiffs were about, but wandered off to another subject, saying, that she must take me home, for she had to run down to Longside Farm to get some eggs for Mrs Mason. The people at Longside were very well to do in the world, she informed me; Farmer Kemp, folks declared, was worth a mint of money; and he was very careful, not at all like the Shaws, who lived at the Manor Farm, called White Hill, which we had seen from the garden. The Shaws were very set-up people, and laughed at the Kemps, and the Kemps had given up visiting them.

A good deal of this I knew before, and very little I cared for it; yet I cannot help noting it now. It was the beginning of a long tale, and I think of it as I think of the little stream that welled forth from the plantation behind the house, and after being caught in a stone basin, where it sparkled clear and bright, made its way stealing by fields, and through ditches, till it became a broad river, with which mud and shingle and all impurity had mingled. Nothing but the sea could cleanse that stream, and nothing but the ocean of God's redeeming love can cleanse the foulnesses that even the best must contract as their life flows forth to eternity.

CHAPTER III.

IT would be useless to attempt a description of all that happened when we first went to live at Dene, and I have put into the account of that morning's walk over the grounds nearly all there is to say about the place, and added some things which

fitly ought to have come in further on. But I write just as the thoughts enter my head, and should not be able to get on at all, when there is so much to say, if I were to take too much time to consider.

We settled ourselves into our little house,—Roger and I,—and Sarah came as it had been agreed, and two days afterwards Roger took me over to Compton to the clergyman there, and arranged that I was to go to the village school. Sarah had a sister, about twelve years old, who went, and she was to take care of me. I know some people thought it strange that I should be sent to mix with everybody's children, and declared that my father and mother would never have allowed it if they had been living. But William and Roger both knew what my parents would have wished better than the world did, and Roger has often told me that the things he heard about the schools in Hove made him very unwilling to place me at one. He wanted me, he said, to grow up useful, and to know my place in the world, and from what he could see of the girls who had gone to those boarding-schools, it was just what they had never been taught. They were always trying to get out of their place. It took a good many years, and a good deal of experience too, to enable me to understand entirely all that Roger meant by that. As for my own wish, I was so glad to escape being sent away from Roger, that I would have borne real suffering rather than be sent to a boarding-school in Hove. And I was quite happy at Compton; every one was very kind to me. The clergyman came to see us and instruct us himself, and I was taught to read, and write, and cypher, and do needlework, in a way which has been an advantage to me all my life, and, much more than that, I was made to look upon religion as the one thing to be considered above all others. That is the best lesson any one can acquire; all others are easy afterwards; and I thank God that He placed me so early under the care of those who had learned it themselves, and so were well able to teach it to me.

I had some weeks at school, and then came harvest time and holidays, when Mrs Mason gave me employment at home, and when I was allowed to enjoy myself by taking a book up to the seat on the top of the bank, and sitting there all alone by myself, reading or listening to the chirp of the grasshoppers, and the songs of the birds in the plantation. I liked that seat better than any other, partly, I believe, because no one else seemed ever to think about it; but there was a pleasure, too, in being close to the

down, feeling that I might, if I chose (though I never really wished to do so), wander all over it, and even go across St Anne's Hill, to the great cliffs above the sea-shore, and there find a vessel to carry me all over the world. I had many fancies of that kind from the books I read. Reading was quite my snare; I did so delight in it, and so I do to this day. When Mrs Mason gave me work to do, I used to carry it to the upper seat, fully meaning to do it, but if I had a book at my side, I spent more minutes than I ought in looking into it between whiles. Some books I had from the school-library at Compton, and Mrs Mason let me have some old magazines, which I was never tired of, though I knew most of the stories nearly by heart.

September came, and I went to school again; and just about that time there was a bustle at Dene; putting the garden in order, and cleaning out the rooms, and arranging the furniture, because Mr and Mrs Weir and Miss Milicent were expected for two months.

A grand time it seemed to be for Mrs Mason and Fanny. As for me, I cried terribly, because I thought the family would take possession of the garden, and the plantation, and all the places I liked, and that I should never be able to go near them. I complained to Roger, but he would not encourage me in such nonsense. He said that if I was a good child, I should never want pleasures, and if I was a naughty one, I should not deserve them.

It was Saturday afternoon, so I had not been to school; but I sat in the kitchen mending my clean things, which had just come from the wash; and Sarah was busy sweeping up, and putting things in order for Sunday. We heard a carriage come up the road, and I jumped up and said, 'Here's Mrs Weir,' and Sarah ran to the door, and stood there with the broom in her hand. We had not heard for certain that they would come on that day. There was a chance that they might have stopped till Monday; but we were sure it could be no one else, because although there was a right of footway through the grounds, no carriages had any business along our road, and nothing with wheels ever came by it, unless it might be every now and then Mr Weir's light cart, going over the hill to Compton or Hatton.

The carriage stopped. It was closed, so that we could not see who was within. Mrs Mason and Fanny came out in a great hurry, and made many curtsies; and then the footman (there was a grand footman, dressed in a drab-coloured coat, with red trimming, and a coachman like him, only stouter) opened the

door, and an elderly gentleman got out, and walked straight into the house, with his chin up in the air, not stopping to speak to any one. I noticed nothing about him but his nose,—and somehow, whenever I looked at him afterwards, that was the only feature which ever caught my eye. It seemed to have a way of speaking, as most people's eyes speak. A lady followed; very upright and well-formed she was, but so small,—she might have been taken for a child, when one only looked at her back. She had a sweet face, though it was very sallow and sickly; and her bonnet was made in an old-fashioned way, to come over her forehead and protect her eyes, which seemed very weak. Mrs Mason helped her out of the carriage herself, putting an arm round her for support, and then the lady shook her so heartily by the hand, it was quite pleasant to see; and she patted Fanny gently on the shoulder, and I think asked some questions about Roger, as I saw her turn round and look towards the cottage. Mrs Mason must have said something to please her, for she nodded her head slowly, several times, as if she was quite satisfied. She seemed willing to stay and talk more, but Mrs Mason prevented her, and went with her into the house, just as I saw a large foot, with a boot like a man's, protrude from the carriage. The footman stood back, and so did Fanny and the coachman, it seemed as if they could not make room enough for what was coming. Yet it was not such a very large body; when Miss Milicent stood upon the ground, she was scarcely more than five feet six, and stout in proportion; but the very way in which she put her head into the carriage, and out again, and called the footman, and tossed a parcel to Fanny, and gave an order to the coachman, all, as it were, in one breath, made one feel at once as though the world was not big enough for her. It was some seconds before I quite determined what she was like. She must have had a great fancy to be a man, for certainly she had taken pains enough to make herself look as like one as a woman's dress will allow. She had on a stuff gown, made very short, and a loose black jacket, with no white collar, nor anything of that kind to make it pretty; only a red handkerchief tied round her neck. Besides, she wore a black straw-bonnet, with a plain white border in the inside, and not a bit of ribbon or flower. Her face was like Mr Weir's, only smaller, and without quite such a nose; but she had eyes to make up for it, so sharp, they were in constant motion, and they danced about as though they had a life of their own, quite independent of Miss Milicent herself, and

were determined to see everything there was to be seen in this world.

I thought the trunks would never come to an end. The coachman wanted to carry some of them into the house, but Miss Milicent would have them all taken from the carriage first. She kept every one waiting upon her, and I could not help fancying she took a pleasure in occupying just double the time needed. But the business was finished at last, and Miss Milicent was able then to stop and speak to Fanny, which she did in the same sort of way as I have seen a lawyer question a witness in a court of justice. Fanny curtsied at every answer, but she would fain have run away, I am sure, and she did after a while move to one side, as a kind of hint to Miss Milicent to go in-doors. But instead of that, what should we see but Miss Milicent coming across the road to the cottage! Sarah threw down the broom, and ran off to hide herself in one of the outhouses; I thought it mean to follow her, and I did not see what cause I had to be afraid of Miss Milicent, or of any one, if I was not doing anything wrong; so I went back to my seat to finish darning my stocking, but I own my heart beat rather fast.

In she came, without knocking at the door, and I felt quite affronted, and just for a moment could not make up my mind to rise from my seat. She caught me up for it directly. 'Little girls ought to learn to be civil,' she said, 'when ladies take the trouble to come and see them! What are you about there? Mending your stockings? Very good work, but you don't do it properly. You should draw the stitches together first.' To my dismay, she took a pair of scissors, cut a little hole deliberately in my Sunday stocking, and then, catching the needle from my hand, unthreading it in her haste, sat down to show me how to bring the edges together again. I was so angry, I could have pricked her fingers with the needle when I gave it back to her threaded. I am nearly sure I gave it a little poke with that intention, but she did not seem to feel it, and, taking up the stocking, made me come quite close to watch her, whilst she went on talking all the time. 'Who taught you to work? You ought to know better. How old are you? Nine and a half?—you don't look more than six. You can't have had any pains taken with you. Now, attend, do you see? first one stitch, then the other—drawn together closely; that makes the hole smaller. You must darn it over afterwards. I shall make them teach darning in that way at Compton school. Don't forget! I shall

come and see you again, and find out if you have attended to what I say. If you are a good child, I shall give you some of my stockings to mend. Now get up and open the door; you always ought to open the door for ladies. They don't teach you at all good manners at Compton school; I shall see about it.'

See about it!—yes. I felt, indeed, that she would see about it, and so should I. I opened the door for her because she stood waiting for me to do it, but I closed it behind her instantly, and rushing back to my stocking, tore out all the stitches she had put in, and tossed the stocking across the room.

Sarah came back and saw me kicking my feet against a chair to vent my rage. She laughed, which made me still more angry. I began to scold because she had gone away and left me. 'The tiresome woman wouldn't have dared cut a hole in my stocking,' I said, 'if you had been here;' and I ran to the other end of the room, caught up the stocking, and thrust my finger through the hole, making it half as large again, and when Sarah still would do nothing but laugh, I leaned my head upon the table, and fairly cried with temper and vexation.

Roger entered just at that moment. When he saw me in tears, he came up to me in his kind way and took me upon his knee; but he could get nothing from me except that Miss Milicent had been to see me, and cut a hole in my stocking, and I hated her, and if she lived at Dene I should run away.

He must have been very much puzzled, but he knew pretty well what I was like when I was in what William used to call one of my tantrums; so instead of trying to talk to me, he just said, 'My little Trot will be better up-stairs for a while;' and then he took me up in his arms and carried me to my room, and shut the door and left me.

I was not sulky—that was never part of my disposition—only terribly passionate. I stamped and screamed a good deal at first, but no one came near me, and at last I went to the window, and had my thoughts turned by watching the servants finishing the unpacking of the carriage, and by the time Roger came back I was quite quiet, and sorry for having been so naughty, and he took me down-stairs again.

We sat down to tea, and after a little while Roger began asking me again about Miss Milicent. I was not angry with him as I was with Sarah when he laughed as I told my grievance. Roger often laughed at things which other people cry about, but

I told him he wouldn't have liked it if it had been his stocking, and he had had to darn it.

'I should not have liked it, Ursie, may be, but I would have taken it as it was meant.'

'It was meant to tease me,' I said, and I felt my face quite red again.

Roger made no answer. I saw he was vexed, and I put down my bread and butter, and threw my arms round his neck, and called him 'dear Father Roger.'

That always softened him. He gave me a great hug in return, but still he did not speak, till I touched him and asked him what he was thinking about.

'Nothing, Trot, that you can understand now ; but it wouldn't be such a hard world to live in, if people looked more at what is meant, and less at what is done.'

He was very silent after that, as was his wont, and when tea was over he went out again, and I took up my stocking and tried to mend it in Miss Milicent's fashion, feeling somehow, from what Roger had said, that I had been hard upon her.

CHAPTER IV.

SUNDAY was the pleasantest day in the week to me. Roger walked with me over the down quite early, and left me at the Sunday-school, and went himself to see an old aunt, my mother's sister, who was very infirm, and could never go out ; and there he stayed till church time. I sat with the school children in church ; but Roger's seat was very near, and I could see him, whenever I looked up, with his eyes upon his book, and that made me look upon mine. Otherwise there was a good deal to teach one to be inattentive : the boys sat close to us, and were very troublesome ; slyly pulling at each other's books, and whispering, and then the master would reach over into the middle of them with his stick, and give a sharp tap, which just as likely touched the good ones as the bad. The girls were not any better than the boys. I was often tapped myself, though I don't really think I deserved it so much as some of the others. There was such a trouble, too, about repeating the responses. Some would speak out, and some would not ; and every now and then one

boy took it into his head to shout ; and down came a message from the master, that if he did, he should be caned ; then we all grew silent, and there came another message, that if we didn't speak out we should be locked up. It was trying to know how to keep straight amongst it all ; but what did me most good was to see Roger standing there, so still, and grave, and earnest looking, and his face different, in a way, from what it was at other times. It was a very dear face always to me ; though his skin was not smooth, and his hair brushed neat like a gentleman's, I often thought I would not change it for the handsomest picture I had ever seen. But on Sundays, in church, another look was given to it, as if all in it that had been gathered from the toil and care of life had been taken away. It came across the one day, when I noticed him just as he rose up from his prayers, that if I were to see him in heaven, he could scarcely be anything different.

That Sunday we went into church rather more noisily than usual. Kitty Dove, Sarah's sister, pushed little Johnnie Rowe, and nearly threw him down, and Johnnie pinched Kitty, and made her cry ; and some of the bigger girls were whispering about it to the mistress, and begging that Kitty and Johnnie might not sit near each other. But all of a sudden there was a great 'Hush !' The girls left off fidgeting, and put their hands in their laps ; and the boys began to find out the Psalms in their prayer-books. A sudden fright had taken them all. I peeped out from a back corner in which I was sitting, and saw at the church door Mrs Richardson, the vicar's wife, and Miss Richardson, and one or two other ladies who taught in the Sunday-school, and in the middle of them Miss Milicent,—not one whit different from what she was on Saturday night, just the same loose jacket and red handkerchief. The girls glanced round at her, and the corners of their mouths went ; but not a word was said. Mrs Richardson and the other ladies went to their seats ; but up came Miss Milicent to us ; her eye seemed to take in all at one glance, and half a dozen names were out of her mouth almost in a breath, and in a whisper so loud it could be heard nearly all over the church:—'Mary Webb, how's your mother?' 'Fanny Hart, what d'ye mean by coming in that fine bonnet?' 'Johnnie, you've got a swelled face, I see; come up to Dene, and you shall have some stuff to do it good.' 'Jane, who is that little one by you? Your sister? She is too young to come to church; she won't behave well. Mind you all attend. Keep your eyes upon

your books; speak out properly. I shall be looking at you. Mrs Richardson says you are very idle. I shall have an eye upon you.' Miss Milicent shook her head fiercely, and turned away; and the moment her back was towards us, and she was out of the hearing of a whisper, such a buzz began as might almost have drowned the clergyman's voice when he commenced the service, but that a loud tap from the stick came down upon the shoulders of the head boy, sounding loudly through the church, and making Miss Milicent thrust her head forward, and shake her hand at us, threatening a still severer and more mysterious punishment. Yes, we were all quiet after that; but I don't think any of us remembered that we were bound to be so because we were in God's presence.

When we came out of church, Roger met me, and I went with him to speak to William, who always came to Compton now, that he might have a chance of seeing Roger. Before, he had been accustomed sometimes to walk over the hill the other way to Hatton. It was a little farther, but William rather liked making a business of going to church. Roger always kept to one church, and went twice if he could, though at that time it was too far for me; but William never troubled himself about service in the afternoon. He said it was the only time he had for looking over his accounts. I used to fancy that it worried Roger to have to meet William and talk to him just after church. He never said it, but he used to answer rather shortly when William began consulting him about the crops; and that was not at all his way generally. But William was a great talker, and seldom noticed much whether any one was listening to him, as long as he could have his say without interruption.

I was glad to be away from the school-children, for I saw Miss Milicent go up to them again; and I was beginning to have a feeling that wherever she was, a scolding was close behind. We went up the lane by the Abbey Farm, which took us to the foot of the down, and then we scrambled up a steep path which was a shorter way than by the cart-track. Such a very bright Sunday it was! The sky and the sea so blue, and all the country quiet, so as it never is on any other day,—a kind of quietness which seemed as if it would creep into one's heart and live there. How I wished that William would leave off talking about the crops as he did; not letting one be at peace for an instant, but pointing out first this field, and then that, and reckoning how much had been got from each, and complaining—

William always complained, when he talked of his crops--that the rent of Sandcombe was so high, it made him much worse off than his neighbours! Roger bore it very patiently; he laughed a little now and then, and said something rather sharp in a good-natured way; but he never lectured William, nor let him see that he wished to get away from him, and so William was very fond of him, and put forth all that was in his mind quite freely.

We were at the top of the down, and there we were to part company. Roger took out his watch, observing he must hurry home, for there would not be time else for dinner and going to afternoon service. William waited before he replied, and then he said, in a kind of awkward, shy way, 'I have some other business in hand for this afternoon.' He laughed so oddly that I caught up his words and said, 'What business, William? People should not do business, you know, on Sundays.'

'You are a prying, little body,' he answered, quickly, though not at all as if he was angry. 'Roger, you'll repent it some day, if you don't keep her in better order.'

'Miss Milicent will do that,' said Roger, and he laughed; 'but I should like to know your business myself, William, since you have chosen to mention it.'

'Business not lying so very near home,' continued William; 'taking me over to Hatton perchance.'

'Going to church?' I said; 'I wish Roger would go to Hatton Church too, and take me with him.'

'Something to do with going to church, to be sure,' said William, laughing again, as though he had a mystery in his mind. 'What do you say, Roger? Do you approve? "The better day, the better deed," you know!'

Roger considered, then said, 'I would have all things go right with you, William, if I could. But these are not matters for any to interfere in; only I think, if you went to church first, you might be better likely to come to a wise choice.'

'I can't go to church at Hatton,' said William. 'Mr Fowler preaches in the afternoon; and he's a drawler, and sends me to sleep: it's no good in the world for me to go to church in the afternoon.'

'Well, you must take your own way,' said Roger. 'I only know that I find things go straighter when I put church and such things first, than when I let them come in second; and so I thought it might be with you.'

'Men are not like sheep, they don't all run the same way,'

replied William, rather sulkily. 'So you won't give me your good wishes, Roger!'

Roger took his brother's hand, and shook it with a hearty grasp. His heart seemed full, and he turned away, and walked home in silence.

They thought I did not understand, but I did. That sharp woman, Leah Morris, lived at Hatton, and she was going to be my sister-in-law. I asked no questions of Roger, I knew it was a matter that vexed him; but we had dinner as soon as we reached home, and then Roger went to church again. I sat for some time in the window-seat learning my Collect and Psalm for the next Sunday; and then went over to see Mrs Mason, who was staying at home to let Fanny go to church, and had a game of play with the kitten, and read a story out of one of the school-library magazines, and when it was growing rather late, walked up to the top of the down to meet Roger coming back from church. After that I helped Sarah to get tea ready: we always had it in the parlour on Sundays, and as there was no hurry for work, we were a long time at it. I talked to Roger about school, and what I learned, and how I liked the little boys and girls; and when we had finished, and Sarah was washing up the tea-things in the kitchen, Roger brought out a large Bible with pictures for me to look at, and soon after that it was bed-time. I was very happy, but I had not forgotten all the while that Leah Morris was to be my sister-in-law.

CHAPTER V.

I DID not see Miss Milicent again till Monday evening, when I came back from school, for I went away early to be at Compton at nine o'clock, and always took my dinner with me to avoid the long walk in the middle of the day.

She was at the door talking to Roger when I reached home, and I hoped she did not notice me at first. Her tongue was going so fast about fences and ditches: I believe she thought she knew as much about them as Roger did. I passed her and went in-doors, and had just taken off my bonnet and begun to learn my lessons for the next day, when wide open went the door, and in she came by herself. 'So,' she said, 'little body, how did you manage

your work on Saturday?' It was not an ill-natured voice after all, and Roger's words were remembered; so I answered, as civilly as I could, 'that I had tried to do it right.'

'Very good; let me see. Did you wear the stockings yesterday? have you got them on to-day?' Before I could speak again, she had caught up my foot, and pulled off my shoe to look. Couldn't I have kicked her! I wonder I didn't; but I sat quiet, not trusting myself to speak. She spied the hole directly. 'Pretty well considering. I shall send you some of my darning for a pattern. Saturday is a holiday; you shall come and work with me on Saturdays. Mrs Weir wants to see you. Come across with me, I shall take you to her, and there is something to spend in sugar-plums; I suppose you like sugar-plums.' She tossed sixpence into my lap, and I believe I said 'Thank you.' I did not dare return it. I followed her across the road to the house. Her step might have been a giant's stride, and she went straight from one point to another, like an arrow. It seemed as though she would have knocked down a wall if it had come in her way. We went in by the kitchen, and Miss Milicent looked in as we passed to tell the cook to be sure not to let the mutton be over-roasted, and to take care that there were mashed potatoes, browned, for Mr Weir, and plenty of wine sauce with the pudding. The cook had a very short manner, and scarcely answered her. The family dined late, and there was a great smell of the dinner in the passage, which made Miss Milicent grumble a good deal; indeed she had not left off talking about it when we reached the drawing-room door.

'Mother! I have brought Ursie Grant to see you!' That was the way I was introduced, and Miss Milicent gave me a push, which, I suppose, she meant to be gentle, and left me standing shyly in the middle of the room.

Mrs Weir looked even less, half-buried as she was in her arm-chair, than when I had seen her standing. It was not merely that she was short and thin, but her features were singularly small,—her bones slight, like those of a child, and her hands so white and delicate, it appeared as though the least rough touch would have broken them. She reminded me of what I had read of fairies, and the soft, low voice, which bade me come near and say, 'How do you do?' pleasant, and kind though it was, came forth in a slow, precise way, quite different from anything I had ever heard before.

'Ursula is your name, is it not, my little dear?' said Mrs Weir, and she put one of her slender arms round me, and kissed me on the forehead.

'Ursie, they call me, ma'am,' was my answer.

'Ursie, or Ursula, it is a very good name. There has been one Saint Ursula; I trust that you may be another.'

I stared at her. She said it as if she certainly believed that it was possible, and even likely, I should be a saint; and my notion of a saint was of some one whose business it was to read the Bible and say prayers all day. I replied, 'If you please, ma'am, Roger says that if I am ever anything, he thinks I shall be a dressmaker.'

Mrs Weir did not laugh,—that was one peculiarity about her,—she took everybody's words just for what they meant. She only answered, 'I can explain my meaning when we are better acquainted. Ring the bell, Ursula,' and then she took up again the work which she was doing, which was a little cotton frock for a child, and I stood by her side, silent, and waiting for what was to come next.

Some minutes passed before the bell was answered, and I amused myself in the meantime by looking round the room. It was wonderfully changed from what it had been when the family were away. I could not think where all the pretty things had come from. Such bright covered books there were on the round centre table, and flowers, and a carved paper-knife, and a beautiful little box inlaid with mother-of-pearl; and, on another table in the corner, a curious cabinet, with figures of animals in front of each drawer, and some strange figures standing by it with white dresses and copper-coloured faces—Indians I believe they were. The best chintz curtains, too, had been put up, and the striped coverings of the chairs taken off. All looked surprisingly neat and pretty; and the prettiest thing of all was Mrs Weir's work-table, placed by her arm-chair. It was a tiny table made in squares of black and yellow wood, and scooped into hollows round the edge, and on it stood the loveliest white work-box, lined with blue, and having a row of mother-of-pearl reals of cotton, and silk winders, with coloured silks beautifully wound, and a pin-cushion with the pins placed in rows, as straight as though they had been put in by rule. It was just fitted for Mrs Weir; scissors, and thimble, and silver bodkin, and smelling bottle, so small and bright, and new-looking; and on the same table was a little china flower-basket,

holding a white moss rose, a carnation, and a bit of lilac verbena, with a sprig of myrtle, and a piece of scented geranium. Only one thing in the whole room looked unsuitable, and that was a large work-basket of coloured straw, put down upon the floor by the window, and out of which peeped what I am sure was the heel of a knitted stocking. That could never have belonged to Mrs Weir.

The footman answered the bell. Mrs Weir was not in the least impatient because she had been kept waiting so long. She said to him just as gently as when she was speaking to me ; 'Richard, some ginger wine and sweet cake, if you please ;' and Richard went away and returned with a wine decanter and a plate of cake placed on a silver tray.

'Will you pour out a glass of wine, Richard, and hand the cake to little Ursula Grant? It will not do you harm, my child.'

I drank off the wine, not at all sure that I liked it, and put down the glass quickly on the tray.

Mrs Weir slowly raised her eyes : 'You are too rapid, Ursula. If you like to take your cake home you can.'

'Thank you, ma'am ;' I caught at the permission directly, and looked towards the door.

'You are wishing to go ; that is very natural ; but you will come and see me again, I hope.'

The tone was cordial and kind, and yet it seemed that Mrs Weir was trying to prevent herself from showing all she felt.

Something came over me which made me say bluntly, 'I shall like to come, ma'am, but I don't want wine and cake.'

'You shall not have them, my child ; we shall do better perhaps without.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' I said again, as heartily as though she had promised me a present. 'I can always come at this time, when I am back from school,' I added.

Such a smile came over Mrs Weir's face ; so sweet and yet so sad. I could have found it in my heart to climb up into her lap, as I did into Roger's, when he looked grave, and entreat her to tell me what it meant. But she was too much a stranger for me to venture ; and even if I had known her better, I don't think I should have done it. Tears rise quickly, for they are near the surface, and human love can comfort the grief from which they flow ; but such a smile as that was from a depth below which God only could reach.

That had been a very short visit to Mrs Weir, and little enough had been said by either of us ; but yet I looked forward to going again. Of course people would say that in spite of my refusal of the cake and wine, I secretly hoped to have more ; but it really was not so. I felt, directly I spoke to Mrs Weir about it, that she meant what she said, as I meant what I said, and that we should be friends without any things of the kind.

As I was at school nearly all day, there was but little spare time after I returned for anything but learning my lessons, and tea, and talking to Roger, and doing a little needlework before bed-time ; but I managed during the course of the next week to run over to the house for a few moments, whilst Sarah was trying to make the water boil, and cutting the bread and butter ; and each time with the hope of being called into the drawing-room again to see Mrs Weir. But I kept my wish to myself, for Mrs Mason was very shut up about the family, and never encouraged me to talk about them ; though she was extremely good-natured to me in other ways. It was Saturday, however, before I went again ; the family had been at Dene a week then, but it seemed a month to me, the place was so changed ; and I had such a feeling of new things and people to care about and think of, though it was so little that I saw of any one.

This time Mrs Mason took me into the drawing-room with her. I observed that she was very thoughtful about Mrs Weir, and anxious in her way of talking to her ; but it was rather as if she regarded her as a child not able to manage for herself. Mrs Weir looked better since she came ; she had more colour in her cheeks, and Mrs Mason noticed this with much pleasure, and both of them praised the air of Dene, and said there was no place like it, in which I quite agreed. I was made to say the hymn I had been learning at school during the week, and then Mrs Weir said she should like to hear me read. I knew it was tea time, but I was afraid to say it ; so Mrs Mason lighted a wax candle, placed in a beautiful little silver candle-stick, for it was growing dark, and I took up the Testament which Mrs Weir had put into my hand, and turned over the pages to find the Twelfth Chapter of St Luke, that being what I had been told to read. I had only finished the first three verses when we were interrupted. The step was so loud that, before I looked up, I thought it must be Miss Milicent ; but it was Mr Weir, and I felt very frightened, for it was the first

time I had seen him so near. He stalked in and sat himself down in the arm-chair without speaking.

'Go on, Ursula,' said Mrs Weir, taking no notice of her husband; but her voice was less firm than it had been a minute before.

Mrs Mason was going away.

'You had better take the child with you, Mason,' said Mr Weir.

His tone grated upon me like a sharp saw, though it was not rough or unlike that of a gentleman.

'Ursula was only going to read a very few verses, that I might judge how she improves at school,' said Mrs Weir, raising herself up in her chair, and leaning forward eagerly.

'"Much study is a weariness to the flesh," is it not?' said Mr Weir, sarcastically.

Mrs Weir sank back, and folded her hands one upon the other, as she said, 'Mason, the little girl may go.'

I thought Mr Weir would have relented; but he sat brooding over his own thoughts, whatever they were. He did not seem to know that I was going till I reached the door; then he called out suddenly, 'Grant is your name, isn't it, child? What have you to do with William Grant of Sandcombe?'

'He is my brother, sir,' I answered.

'Oh! He wants me to lower his rent for some land, because he is going to be married,' continued Mr Weir, addressing his wife. 'He is mistaken if he thinks I am likely to do anything to encourage matrimony.' A light, hollow laugh followed the speech.

I did not hear Mrs Weir answer, for Mrs Mason hurried me out of the room.

'Who told Mr Weir that William was going to be married?' I exclaimed, eagerly, as the door was shut behind us.

'Who but himself?' said Mrs Mason, laughing. 'Didn't you hear Mr Weir say so?'

'But William didn't tell me,' I replied; 'and he ought; sisters ought to know before any one; and I don't like Leah Morris; I can't bear her; I hate her.'

'Little folks have no right to hate any one,' said a loud voice, issuing from the pantry, which we were just at the moment passing. Miss Milicent appeared with her sleeves turned up at the wrist, and a bunch of raisins in her hand. 'It will be a very good thing for you, Ursie Grant, to have a sister-in-law to keep

you in order. Your brother Roger spoils you, and I have told him so. Mason, there are not raisins enough for dessert ; why weren't they sent for from Hove ?'

'They were sent for, Miss Milicent,' replied Mrs Mason ; 'only the carrier is not come back.'

'The carrier must manage to be here earlier,' continued Miss Milicent. 'He stays in the town, drinking ; it's a disgrace. Roger Grant goes to Hove every Saturday ; I shall get him to bring out the things.'

'You won't find that so easy, I am afraid, Miss Milicent,' said Mrs Mason. 'As often as not he rides in ; and he only goes occasionally, when it is necessary.'

'And he has a great many things to bring out for ourselves,' I added, proudly.

It provoked me to receive no answer. I hoped I had offended Miss Milicent ; but she merely said, in an off-hand way, 'There will be a change before next Saturday ;' and then she closed the pantry door in a hurry, and went back to her employment of putting out the dessert, which she always did herself.

'She does not mean badly,' was Mrs Mason's comment ; 'but she loves her own way desperately.'

Mrs Mason spoke as though she was saying it to herself ; but I took up the words and replied, 'I can't tell what Miss Milicent means, only she is very cross.'

'Not so much so as she seems ; you will see that by and by, Ursic. And little folks like you should never set up to be pert and contrary.'

'She makes it come all up here,' I said, and I stood still and pointed to my throat. 'I can't keep it down ; and I don't think Roger, nor William, nor any of them would wish it. Roger is not made to be a carrier.'

Mrs Mason only laughed ; and, encouraged by not being reprov'd, I ran on much in the same way, boasting of my own pride, and saying I was not bound to obey Miss Milicent ; neither was Roger ; and if he was not treated well, he would go away from Dene ; and then what would they all do ?

'Find some one else in his stead,' replied Mrs Mason, carelessly. 'Roger is not every one, you know, child.'

Without answering, I let go her hand, rushed across the carriage-road to the cottage, burst open the door, and seeing Roger seated at the tea-table, threw myself upon his neck in a fit of trembling passion.

'Well! Trot! Well! how now? What's amiss? Look up, Ursie;' and Roger patted my head.

But I was not to be so easily smoothed. I poured forth a torrent of indignation against Mrs Mason, Miss Milicent, Mr Weir, William, every one. I mixed them all up together, making very little sense; but letting it be seen plainly that I was as full of pride and self-will as a child of my age need be; though I put it all off upon my love for Roger.

The storm was allowed to exhaust itself, and then Roger bade me dry my eyes and go up-stairs, and wash my hands and come down again quickly. I did as I was told, feeling in a way that I had been very silly, though I would not have owned it for the world.

Roger usually went out again directly after tea; but this night he sent Sarah into the outhouse, and told her to wash up the tea-things there; and then he took me up on his lap, and said, gravely, 'I meant to have told Trot that William was going to be married, only she has heard it before.'

'I don't care about it,' I said, gloomily. 'But I hate Leah Morris.'

'That is said like a very silly little girl,' answered Roger; 'and it must not be said again.' He looked more stern than I had ever seen him.

I drew closer to him, trying to fondle him, but he kept rather aloof.

'William has a right to marry whom he will,' he continued; 'and if Leah Morris makes him a good wife, there is no one to complain. And I won't have my little Trot speaking as if she knew what was best, when she doesn't and can't know. Yours is a bad temper, Ursie; and it will bring you into trouble.'

'I shouldn't care; I don't care for anything; only for you, Roger,' I said, more humbly.

'Yes, you do, Ursie; you care for yourself. If you didn't, you would not fret me by putting yourself into these humours.'

'It was Miss Milicent!' I exclaimed. 'I should never have been so cross about William, only she made it all come up in my throat by the way she talked. They don't want us, Roger, not Mr Weir, nor Miss Milicent, nor any of them; and Mrs Mason said, that if you went away, they would find some one to put in your place.'

'Of course they would,' he said, and he laughed; 'but I mean to make myself so useful, Ursie, that they shan't very easily find

one to take my place. That is the true way to go on, if you want people to value you. But it is not the value we put upon one another, but what God puts upon us, that is of consequence,' he added, and the Sunday look, which seemed to take him quite away from earth, came over his face.

It did more for me than any talking; and the tears came into my eyes, as I said, 'I am a very wicked child, Roger; will God ever make me good?'

'We will say our prayers, both of us, and try,' he answered; 'that is the sure way. But, Ursie, you must know what to pray about. You like dearly to make every one go your way; that is your fault.'

'Yes,' I said; and I thought for a moment, 'but if I could have things my own way, I would not be like Miss Milicent. I would make every one love me.'

'Not so easy that, Trot. I may like my way, and you may like yours; and though your way were ever so good, yet, if it went contrary to mine, I shouldn't be pleased.'

'Then you would give up,' I said, quickly; 'because you always do.'

He looked very grave. I said again, 'You always give up, because you are my own dear brother Roger.'

'May be I have given up too much already,' he said; 'I am not so sure, Ursie, that you wouldn't be better living away at school.'

I put my hand before his mouth as the words escaped, 'You promised—you told me,' I exclaimed; but he interrupted me.

'No, Ursie, I did not promise, I said we would try.'

'But we have tried, and I am going to be so good, I don't mean to be in a tantrum once again all the next month. O Roger, Roger, I should die if you sent me away!' I clung to him, and my tears came very fast, but they were not angry as before.

He soothed me now in his own kind way; but he said I must not talk of dying because I might have to go away from him. Perhaps it would be my duty by and by.

'But you are my brother,' I said; 'it can't ever be right to go away; only if you wish it,' and I turned to him with a sudden pang at my heart.

'That is not very likely, Ursie; but there are many changes in this world, and it is well to be ready for them.'

'But you would not love any one more than me, ever?' I said;

and I raised my head, which had been resting on his shoulder, and looked him full in the face.

‘Not more, Ursie, no, not more.’ His tone did not satisfy me.

‘And not so much,’ I added ; ‘no one could come into Ursie’s place.’

‘No one, indeed ; little Trot knows she is Roger’s darling.’

‘And I will be your wife. I would rather marry you than any one else,’ I said.

He only laughed and kissed me.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW conversations rest in a child’s mind when no one suspects it ! There was no reason that what Roger had said that evening should have been remembered particularly ; but it was. I fancied it a kind of agreement we had made that we were to be all in all to each other ; and I thought that now, when William was going to marry Leah Morris, there was greater cause than ever why Roger and I should love each other. This made me try to please him more, and I kept a stricter watch over my temper, and learned my lessons more carefully, so as to bring home more good marks from school. I had much just then, I must confess, to keep me in good-humour. William’s marriage was a great event, and in spite of my hatred of Leah Morris, it interested me very much. Besides, Leah was such a grand lady, I had not any notion how grand, till I heard the children at school talking of her. Some of them had relations at Hatton, and they brought all kinds of gossip about her to Compton. The Morrises lived in a farmhouse which was only a little smaller than the Abbey Farm at Compton, and Miss Morris, as Leah was always called, had been to school at Hove, and had learned to play on the piano, and visited the surgeon’s wife, and had been known to drink tea at the parsonage. These were distinctions which made the village people look up to her as somebody very much above them : but, I think, what came over them most was the sight of the green bonnet, and the black silk cloak with lace round it, which she wore at church on Sundays. Such a beautiful

bonnet I was told it was, with such smart flowers on the outside ; it was much finer than any the vicar's wife ever wore. I don't mean that hearing of these things made me like Leah ; I did not find that any one liked her, but I thought it a grand thing to be connected with her ; and as I was not going to live with her, it signified little to me then what she was in other ways.

Roger asked for a holiday for me one Wednesday, when the marriage was quite settled, that I might go over to Sandcombe with him and drink tea, and see Leah, for she and her mother were to be there. Roger managed all his business earlier on purpose ; and I had put on my Sunday frock, and we were just setting off, when a message came, saying that Mrs Weir wanted to see Roger directly. It was Fanny who gave the message, and as we happened to be standing close by the kitchen door, she told me to go in and wait till Roger came back. I sat down in a chair watching the cook getting the dinner ready, when in came Mr Weir. 'What have you got for dinner?' he said, speaking out quickly. Cook answered that Miss Milicent had ordered a couple of chickens. 'They will be over-roasted. I must put off dinner. Come to me for orders, not to Miss Milicent ;' and he stalked out of the kitchen, as if he had been too condescending in putting his foot into it.

Such a fuss the cook was in ! I never saw anything like it. Jane, the housemaid, was in the kitchen, and cook let out her anger to her. 'It was always the case,' she said ; 'not a day passed, but changes were made in that way ; she wouldn't stay, that she wouldn't. She never bargained for master's interference. It was worse here than in London ; she thought they had come to Dene for a quiet life, but little enough quiet there was like to be with Mr Weir and Miss Milicent. And if what folks said was true,'—and then she nodded her head and winked her eyes to give notice of some great secret.

'It is no great matter to us what folks say, that I can see,' replied Jane, 'as long as our wages are paid. I don't see what is to trouble us, unless it might be Miss Milicent, and her bark is always worse than her bite.'

'I could put up with Miss Milicent,' replied the cook. 'I would rather any day be scolded than looked at. But he !—it's more than mortal woman can bear. And to see how he treats his poor wife ; and she, as they say, quite taken in by him at the beginning.'

Jane was a prudent person, and I think, too, she fancied Mrs Mason was coming, for I saw her point to me ; and cook took the hint, and was silent. But I had heard enough to keep me from taking any fancy to Mr Weir, even if I had been so inclined.

Roger waited in the drawing-room for a long time, and when he came out he said we could not go to Sandcombe yet, he must have a word with Mr Weir first. I saw he was rather put out, but I never ventured to ask him any questions about other persons' business. So he went to find Mr Weir, and I returned to the cottage, as he told me, to wait till he was ready. It was half-past four before we set off ; and I thought even then we should have had something to hinder us, for when we reached the top of the hill, by the plantation, and were going out upon the down, Roger looked back, and said he heard carriage-wheels ; a person he wished much to see must be arrived, but he had not expected him so soon.

'You won't stop now, Roger,' I said ; and I tried to draw him on. But in vain ; he would stay to listen ; and we heard the carriage drive up to the house ; and almost directly afterwards the footman came panting up the hill to beg Mr Grant to go back, just for a few minutes.

It was so vexatious ! I said to Roger that we had much better leave Sandcombe till another day ; they would have finished tea before we got there ; and he was half inclined to agree with me, only he did not like to disappoint William. Down he ran again, and I went inside the little wicket-gate, opening upon the upper seat in the garden, and there I seated myself to wait for him.

So still and quiet it all seemed,—so far away from any vexing care. I felt that if people would only let me live there undisturbed with Roger, I should have nothing else to desire. Now there were always interruptions ; Roger was ordered about, and people found fault with him. I did not think it could be so always. And then I went off into a dream of what might happen by and by, of a time when he was to be master and I was to wait upon him. I never really thought I should leave Dene, I was too happy there ; and yet I had a notion that Roger and I were one day to have a farm together, when he was to trust and consult me, and let me help him in everything. For I was to be first in all ways : others were to respect and look up to Roger, but no one was to love him like me. I did not think that at all a selfish notion ; I was sure I could make him so happy. My fancies

were interrupted by the sound of voices at the foot of the little rough flight of steps, which led from the garden to the upper seat. A few moments afterwards Mr Weir made his way through the shrubs, followed by Roger and a man, whom I guessed directly to be the stranger just announced. I was not inclined to run away ; my impulse almost always was to turn and face Mr Weir, as I might a bull, to show that I did not care for him. I had a kind of notion that he was born to be every one's enemy, and that I was to rise up in defence ; so I remained in my place, only standing, because I had always been taught to be respectful ; but Mr Weir took no notice of my being there, which was very provoking. I thought I would have answered him so boldly, if he had asked why I was at the upper seat. He seemed to be full of business ; he did not even stop to take breath, though he had come up the steps very fast, but he went on talking, and pointing to the down, and saying something about rent, and value of land ; and then William's name was mentioned, and I saw Roger's face change. I doubt whether any one would have noticed it except myself, but I knew every turn of his likings and dislikings always. Mr Weir gave no time for an answer for some seconds ; but when he stopped at last, the strange man replied. Mr Weir turned sharply round directly, and listened with his head bent forward and his nose looking exactly as if it was watching for what was coming. What made people call it handsome, I can't think. His face was that of a bird of prey ; not an eagle—it was not noble enough for that—but some that I have read of.

'I shouldn't like to give my opinion in a hurry, sir,' were the first words I heard the stranger say ; and his voice had such a pleasant sound, that I looked up at him with quite a new feeling.

He might have been three or four years younger than Roger. His face was not one which showed age ; the complexion was so clear and ruddy, and the eye so bright and laughing. He was not a gentleman ; at least, he had not the same kind of manner as Mr Weir ; his clothes were of a different make, and his words came out quickly and more harshly. But he was more up in the world, I should have said, than Roger ; probably he had had a better education, and seen more of things and people. I could perceive that he was not at all cowed by Mr Weir, which made me like him directly ; and the way in which he glanced at Roger gave me a notion that he knew what he was worth. I don't think, indeed, either of them could have looked at each other and doubted, for two honest faces I never saw.

‘Perhaps, sir,’ said Roger, speaking to Mr Weir, ‘Mr Hervey and I had better walk over the hill together, and then we can talk over matters.’

Mr Weir seemed only half pleased. I was terribly afraid he would offer to come too ; but he had not much of an excuse for that, whatever his wish might have been ; so he just said, in an off-hand way, ‘Well, well, if you like it. Let me see you again, Hervey, when you come back ;’ and then he turned off and went down the steps.

‘Now, Trot, run on before us,’ said Roger, opening the gate upon the down. I would rather have remained close to him, but I always obeyed him, and I kept at a distance in front, looking for foxgloves—which I could not find, it was so late in the season—and every now and then making myself a little bed amongst the fern till Roger came up, when I ran on again. At the top of the hill, near where the paths branch off on one side to Compton, and on the other to Sandcombe, Mr Hervey and Roger stopped. Roger pointed to Compton : ‘The best part of the property lies down there,’ he said.

‘It looks compact,’ observed Mr Hervey. ‘It is a thousand pities to cut it up : but I suppose where a lady has a fancy, there is nothing else to be done.’

Roger said not a word in reply.

‘She must have had a good property of her own,’ said Mr Hervey.

‘Dene, and the Abbey Farm, and some more land, out by Hove ; a good fifteen hundred a year altogether,’ replied Roger.

‘And all to be sold ! Well, it is a fortunate thing we have only our business to do, Mr Grant, and needn’t trouble ourselves with anything beyond.’

Roger hesitated ; he seemed to be considering what he might say. At length it came out hastily, ‘Mrs Weir would rather it should be mortgaged than sold. That is between ourselves.’

‘Oh !’— It was a very long ‘oh,’ which must have signified a good deal. Mr Hervey’s open face became grave, and he added, ‘So there are two minds. I guessed that.’

‘And I don’t think he can sell it,’ continued Roger. ‘I don’t think the trustees would let him do it.’

‘Fortunate that, perhaps,’ was the answer. ‘Well, at all events, we will go over the property to-morrow, Mr Grant ; nothing preventing.’

They shook hands heartily. Mr Hervey went back to Dene,

and I caught hold of Roger's hand, and asked him what mortgaging and trustees meant.

'What I hope you will never be troubled with, Trot. Now let us have a run down the lane, or they will have done tea before we get there.' He lifted me over the gate into the lane, and followed almost before I could turn to see if he was coming, and then we had a race, in spite of the rough stones, to the entrance of the farm-yard.

CHAPTER VII.

ROGER was right; we were nearly late for tea. The maid was carrying the urn into the large parlour just as we arrived. I felt bound to be on my best behaviour the moment we were shown into the room, for this parlour was never used except on special occasions. It was a very good-sized room, but not in general very cheerful-looking. The walls were a pale grayish blue; a few prints in black frames were hung against them, and there was a looking-glass in a carved oak frame over the mantelpiece. On one side of the fireplace was a book-case, with glass doors; and on the other an old cracked spinet. A mahogany dining-room table, covered with a red cloth, stood in the centre of the room, and large black horsehair chairs were ranged in a very orderly way against the wall. Besides, there was a great arm-chair, and a footstool worked in cross-stitch in green and red, and a screen with a green parrot upon it, which had always been a great delight to me. I don't recollect any thing else. We never used the room except for a party.

William had certainly done his best to make it look comfortable this evening. The table was spread for tea, with the best china tea-service, and a large trencher with loaves of brown and white home-made bread upon it; and there was a ham at the bottom of the table, and two pots of marmalade, and honey; and the butter was put out in a glass dish, which had been a wedding present to my mother; and in the centre there was a gay cup filled with dahlias and china-asters. A person might have been very willing to say 'Yes,' when asked to become the mistress of such a comfortable house as William's; that is, if comfort only was to be considered.

Mrs Morris, and Leah, and her brother Charles, were standing up by the window when we came in. William was pointing out something in the garden. He looked round rather awkwardly as the door opened; but he welcomed Roger heartily, and kissed me, saying he had nearly given us up; and then he pushed me a few steps forward to where Leah was standing, and said, 'Ursie must be grown out of your knowledge, Leah. How long is it since you have seen her?'

'Well, I don't know; two years nearly, I should think. To be sure, she is grown; she is getting quite a great girl.' I could feel Leah's eye surveying me from head to foot, though just for the first moment I had a shy fit, and could not look at her: shyness, however, was not much in my way, except when I had a great respect for people; and by the time she had taken in everything belonging to me, from the ribbon on my bonnet to the thickness of my walking-boots, I was able to confront her in return. People said she was handsome, with her black curls, and high colour, and flashing eyes; if she was, I would rather have looked upon something ugly. There was not a trace of anything like softness, either in her face, or her voice, or her manner, or anything about her. She was not ill-tempered looking; but one saw she could be in a passion if she chose; and it was quite certain that if she did choose, it would always be about something that concerned herself. That day she did seem so entirely well pleased with herself! And, perhaps, she had reason to be. There she was, conscious of a fine face and a fortune of two thousand pounds, and a good deal more to come, dressed out in a bright blue silk dress,—what is called a Waterloo blue,—and a fancy straw bonnet, and a smart shawl, and come to visit her husband that was to be, and to be made much of, and to say what she liked or what she did not like. It was enough to turn anybody's head; not that it turned Leah's, for she was then what she always was; neither more nor less wrapped up in her own concerns; only it so happened that circumstances made it appear as though she was.

We sat down to tea; Mrs Morris poured it out, and Leah sat next to William, and made me come on the other side. She petted me all tea-time, offering me bread-and-butter and cake. No doubt she meant it well; but I could not help feeling that, although I was a little girl, I had just as much right in my brother's house to take what I liked as she had, and more too, perhaps, for she was not his wife yet. There was no lack of

conversation. Leah was not a great talker, but her mother was; and we had all the gossip of the neighbourhood told us. Even when Roger and Charles Morris began saying something about farming, Mrs Morris broke in in the middle with a question to Roger.

‘So Mr Roger, you’ve got very comfortable quarters, I suppose, up at Dene?’

‘Very,’ was Roger’s short reply.

‘And all the family there now, I hear; or at least, all coming soon. The bride, Mrs Temple, and her husband are expected next week, they say.’

‘I have not heard.’

‘Isn’t that capital, now?’ and Mrs Morris turned her broad, good-humoured face to William. ‘Your brother is as close as a locked pantry;—as if he didn’t know everything about the Weirs, if he chose to say it!’

Leah took up her mother shortly ‘You won’t make him tell by asking questions, mother. You’ll only provoke him to shut up more.’

‘There is nothing to shut up about, that I am aware of,’ said Roger. ‘If I knew Mrs Temple was coming, I would say so; but I don’t.’

‘Ah, well! then they’re wise in keeping their business to themselves,’ said Mrs Morris, nodding her head meaningly. ‘But folks outside Dene are not quite so careful, Mr Roger; and they say—I wouldn’t for the world tell it for truth—that Mr Temple is not satisfied about his wife’s fortune, and is coming to see her uncle about it; and I have heard that Mr Weir will have to sell part of the Dene estate; not that I can understand myself what business he has with it, for it is all Mrs Weir’s, settled upon her strictly,—so Mr Dillon the lawyer told Charles, when he saw him in Hove last week.’

‘She won’t be a wise woman if she gives it up for any of her husband’s claims,’ said Leah.

‘That is what you think, is it?’ said William, laughing. ‘I suppose that is to teach me what I may expect; but I am not to be daunted. Do you think there is any cause, Mrs Morris? Will Leah stand aloof and say she won’t help at a pinch?’

‘Leah is a good, sensible girl, and you are not like Mr Weir,’ replied Mrs Morris. ‘If you were, you might beg pretty long before her father and I would give her to you. Why, it’s all the

talk in Staffordshire, what a cat-and-dog life they lead. Down here there is not so much known about them.'

'I suppose when I turn dog, I may expect you to turn cat, Leah?' said William.

'Something like it,' replied Leah, a little quickly. I don't think she fancied William's always bringing it forward in this way, that she was going to be married, and that he was to be her master.

'It's no wonder, when they married as they did,' continued Mrs Morris. 'She, just out of the schoolroom, and a second wife. I heard all about it the other day from the Kemps of Longside. They are cousins of the Herveys in Staffordshire; and John Hervey is a land-surveyor, and has had a good deal of business with Mr Weir, or at least his father had for years. Poor man, he died of low fever about this time twelve months ago; since then there have been changes in the business, and I hear John is likely to settle in this neighbourhood, close to the Kemps.'

'Is that the Mr Hervey that came over the hill with us, Roger?' I asked; for I had been taking in eagerly all that was said.

'I suppose so,' was his short answer; and he pushed his tea-cup to Mrs Morris, and asked for another cup of tea.

'Oh! John Hervey is here, is he?' exclaimed Mrs Morris. 'That makes it all clear,—you know, Charles, we heard he was coming. Of course, then, it is quite true about the sale of the property.' She addressed herself to Roger, but received no answer.

William had no dislike to gossip, so he brought her back to the point she had started from. 'Well, but, Mrs Morris, you have not told me the interesting part about the marriage. You know it's fitting Leah and I should hear, that we may take warning in time.' He looked kindly at Leah, but she only smiled haughtily in return; and when he tried to give her hand a little friendly pat, she managed to draw it away, so that his fingers came down upon the table instead.

'The long and the short of it is,' continued Mrs Morris, 'that Mr Weir spends money faster than he can get it, and has done so from a boy. He had as fine a property as a man might wish to have, some six thousand a year when he came of age; but he ran through nearly all of it, and then married a Miss Le Fevre, a Staffordshire heiress. I suspect there was some disappoint-

ment in that quarter about money matters. She had less than he expected, people said; and the very year after her death, he married Miss Mayne, that is the present Mrs Weir, who has a fortune likewise.'

'He has been a lucky man,' said William. 'Two rich wives!—it's more than he deserves.'

'A good deal more,' continued Mrs Morris. 'As to his first wife, he might have done very well with her; I never heard anything about her, but this poor thing has a hard life of it.'

'She is very strange, mother, if Jane Shaw says true,' said Charles Morris.

'Strange or not, he is enough to make her strange,' replied Mrs Morris; 'for ever thwarting and taunting her, and she so ill always!'

'That is what provokes him, I have heard,' remarked Leah. 'He can't bear anybody to be ill, because of the trouble it gives.' She cast her eyes complacently over her own substantial figure, and I suppose it crossed her mind that she was not likely to make William angry from a like cause.

'Mr Roger could tell us more about that than any one else, I suspect,' said Mrs Morris, 'only he is so prudent.'

'I have seen Mrs Weir,' I exclaimed, proud of my superior knowledge; 'and she sits in a great arm-chair, and looks as if she was very ill indeed.'

'Oh! you are allowed to see her, are you?' was the general exclamation, and all eyes were directed towards me. 'Is she so very small as they say?'

'I don't think she is above a head taller than I am,' I replied; 'but she was curled up in the chair so, I can't quite tell.'

A general laugh followed, even Roger joined in it; but he added, as if to give me warning, 'It's no use for you to try and tell anything about Mrs Weir, Trot. What should such a child as you know?'

'But I can tell about her,' I continued; 'I have looked at her a great deal; and I know what Mr Weir said,—that he shouldn't encourage anybody to marry.'

'Because of what I had been asking, I suppose,' said William. 'I had been talking to him, and telling him I was likely to have hard times coming, and so I hoped he would be merciful about the land I rent of him.'

'And what did Mrs Weir say to him, Ursie!' inquired Mrs Morris.

‘She did not say anything,’ I replied, ‘only she told Mrs Mason to take me away.’

‘He interferes with her always, I have heard,’ continued Mrs Morris. ‘She never takes a fancy to anything, but what he steps in and spoils her pleasure. It seems, indeed, as if he had a spite against women, for he is never pleasant to them.’

‘A second wife ought to have known better than to be taken in by him,’ observed Leah.

‘She should have asked him to drink tea,’ said William; ‘that would have been the right thing.’

‘Mrs Weir has not too much wisdom of any kind, as far as I can learn,’ replied Mrs Morris. ‘I have been told she is next door to an idiot.’

I started from my seat. ‘Mrs Weir an idiot! She was no more an idiot than I was! She had been very kind to me; she had given me some cake and some ginger wine. I couldn’t bear such things said of her.’

‘Silence, Ursie! “Little girls should be seen and not heard;”’ and Roger laid his hand heavily on my shoulder. ‘I don’t think any one who knows Mrs Weir can call her an idiot,’ he continued; ‘she is as clever a woman of business as any one might wish to talk to.’

‘Oh! you are in her confidence, I perceive,’ observed Mrs Morris; ‘no wonder we are so careful. But you mustn’t be angry, Mr Roger. I only say what the world does; and it is certain she is kept like a doll, waited upon from morning till night, as if she was not able to take care of herself, and pleased with pretty things set about her, as a child might be. I know that from our cook, who was kitchen-maid at Dene last year. She said Mrs Weir was a mere nobody, and that Miss Milicent gave all the orders.’

‘Miss Milicent is likely to do that, whether she has to deal with idiots or sensible women, I suspect,’ observed Charles Morris; ‘she would rule a regiment. But how could such a woman have a mother like Mrs Weir?’

‘How could Mrs Weir have a daughter like Miss Milicent? you mean,’ said Leah. ‘But there is no rule that I ever knew, why mothers and daughters should be alike.’ She made a little movement as she spoke, which showed that she had finished her own tea, and expected every one else to finish theirs. William drank up what was left in his cup, and never asked for more; and Leah, without saying anything to her mother, rose from the table.

Mrs Morris laughed good-naturedly, and said they were leaving her in the lurch, and they ought to remember that she had been making tea for them all ; but Leah was not to be put out of her way, and she went off with William, saying that she wanted to go over the house.

Mrs Morris motioned to me to come and sit near her, to keep her company, but Roger made an excuse for me. He had promised William, he said, to look at some fences which had been put up round the yard. He should like me to go with him, and then I could see the pigs and the new calf. There would not be time else, as it was growing late.

Mrs Morris was only half pleased with the arrangement, I could see ; neither was I, for I felt, from Roger's manner, that he was dissatisfied with me. The moment we were out of the house, he said, 'You are a chatterbox, Ursie. That won't do if you are to live with me. What is said and done at Dene is never to be talked of outside the gates. It is a rule you will have to remember all your life, that when you live with a family, you are no more to talk about their concerns than you would about your own. It isn't honest.'

'Mrs Morris talked ; I didn't,' I exclaimed ; 'and I said nothing but what was true.'

'That is no matter,' continued Roger ; 'once for all I say that, if you are to live with me, you are not to repeat anything you hear. There is often more mischief in repeating than in doing ; and I hate a gossip.'

Roger only intended to give me a caution to be used generally ; but he could not prevent my feeling there was something of a mystery about Dene.

I went with him to the yard to look at the fences, and then fed the pigs, and paid a visit to the calf ; but all the time I was not happy. When we were going into the house again, I stopped him, and said, 'Roger, you are not angry with me ? I am so sorry.'

He caught me up in his great arms, and gave me such a hug ! —it was like being in a bear's grasp. One had only to say one was sorry, and forgiveness was ready directly.

Leah had her things on ready to go when we went back to the parlour. Charles Morris had been sent to order the pony-chaise ; for they had driven over, though it was nothing of a walk for a strong woman like Leah. She, and William, and Mrs Morris, were deep in consultation ; and directly I came in,

Leah took hold of me as though she had a kind of right to me, and said, 'It won't be so long now, Ursie, before you and I may see more of each other.'

'Only three weeks,' said William; 'what do you say, Ursie, to having a new sister in three weeks' time?'

'I have done very well without one,' was my answer. It made me angry that they should all take it so for granted that I was to be pleased.

William laughed awkwardly; but Leah answered, 'You will learn to do better with one soon;' and then she walked away to the glass to arrange her black curls.

I had managed to put all the party out by my pert speech, and no wonder; Roger especially was vexed, and made me beg Leah's pardon, which I did, I fear, with a bad grace. William said, when Mrs Morris and the others were gone, that I was getting beyond Roger, and he was sure I was not kept strictly enough. It was a good thing for me, he added, that Leah was coming into the family, for there would be some one then to keep me in order. He could not help thinking, indeed, that it might be well if the plan that had been first talked about could be carried out, and if I were to come and live at Sandcombe entirely. Of course that would require some arrangement about expense; but no doubt Roger would be willing to take his share, as he had no claims of his own.

I suppose William forgot that Roger took all the expense at that time; and that the claims, as he called them, were only such as he had made to please himself. Strange to say, I was not frightened at the proposal, I was so certain that Roger would never consent to it. I only held his hand more tightly, and squeezed it very hard when he said, he was afraid that Trot did require a strict hand over her; but she had been much better since she went to school; and as to parting with her, he would as soon think of parting with his right eye; many thanks to William, though, for proposing it.

No; I might have many trials in store for me in life, but a home with Leah Morris I felt certain was not to be one.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE weeks after that, William and Leah Morris were husband and wife. They were married at Hatton Church, and a grand day was made on the occasion. A party of five-and-twenty went to church—most of them Leah's relations—for we had scarcely any living near enough to be asked; and there were six bridesmaids dressed in blue gauze and white bonnets; and Leah herself in a figured lilac silk, with flounces which stood out like a hoop, and a pink bonnet. I was one of the bridesmaids, the youngest, and so made much of; and I almost forgave Leah for becoming my sister-in-law, when I found myself in such a grand position. The day was fine, and everything went off well. Leah was a capital manager—much better than Miss Milicent, for she never talked about what she did. Mrs Morris took care of the eating, and Mr Morris provided some wonderfully strong ale, and saw that there was plenty of wine for those who liked it, and spirits for any who had a fancy for something more powerful. But Leah was the person who kept everything going; at least, as long as she was there. She was not at all shy, and, what was more to her praise, she did not pretend to be; so she talked to one and the other, and told them where they were to sit, and what they were to do; and even helped to marshal them round the breakfast-table after they came back from church. She could put her hand to anything; and William looked on as pleased as possible, feeling, I am sure, that he had made a capital bargain in marrying such a good manager.

Roger was very merry too; and as for me, I laughed and talked with every one; especially I made acquaintance with some of the Shaws, of White Hill. Jane Shaw was but two years older than myself, and being the only two children who were bridesmaids, we were put together at breakfast; and Jane told me all about her home, and how they kept a phaeton, and had a beautiful best parlour, with pictures in it, and wax flowers under a glass case: and then she made me look at her pocket-handkerchief, and admire the pretty lace round it; and showed me a bracelet of large white beads (Roman pearls she called them), and a gold brooch, which her mother had given her to wear. She talked in a very silly way, and was so set up that she made me boast in my turn, and I forgot what Roger had said about not gossiping,

and described how beautiful Dene was, and how I was in the habit of going to see Mrs Weir, and reading to her. Jane Shaw was very curious, like every one else, about Mrs Weir. The only people who could tell her anything about her, she said, were the Kemps, of Longside; and they didn't know the Kemps now. She had not spoken herself to Mary Kemp, though they stood close together in church.

'Is Mary Kemp here?' I asked.

'Oh yes; just across the table down at the lower end; don't you see? She was talking to little Jessie Lee just before breakfast. You must know her.'

'I have played with her sometimes,' I replied, 'but not often; and I don't know Jessie Lee.'

'Not know her! Well, that is to live shut up! Why, Jessie is a cousin of your own.'

'A cousin of mine!' I stared at her in astonishment.

'Yes, to be sure; she is Leah Morris's—what a shame of me to forget!—she is Mrs Grant's cousin's child; and she is going to live with the Morrises. She is not much more than a baby, for she is only five years old; but she has been away lately, because Mrs Morris has been too busy to attend to her.'

'I saw Roger playing with a child,' I said; 'but I didn't know who it was; he always takes to babies.'

'The Morrises make fuss enough about her,' continued Jane. 'You should see how she comes to church, with her little round hat and white feather. They will make her quite conceited; and there is no need, for she is that already. She is a regular beauty.'

Our conversation was interrupted just then, for Leah stood up to cut the cake, and there was a great drinking of healths and cheering; and afterwards, Leah left the table, and Mrs Morris went with her to pack up the last things in her travelling-box, and a few minutes afterwards she came back to say good-bye. She and William were to go, that afternoon, to Hartwell, a town about eight miles beyond Hove; and the next day they were to proceed to London, where they were to spend a fortnight with an aunt of ours and some of Leah's relations.

Things were a little dull after she was gone, though Charles Morris did get up and make a speech, in which he said that he hoped all the bridesmaids would be married before that time next year. Jane Shaw and I laughed, because it seemed such a droll notion for us children, but I don't think any one else did. I

suppose they had all heard it too often, for I believe the same thing is always said at weddings.

Roger was Mrs Morris's right hand when Leah was gone. It was quite a new thing to see him come out in that way. He and Charles Morris did all they could to make people merry, and as soon as the breakfast was cleared away (it was called a breakfast, but in truth it was a dinner), a fiddler, who had been sent for, was brought in, and we all stood up to dance. I was made to begin, because I was William's sister, and very pleasant I thought it to be at the head of the country dance, though I knew little enough of what I was to do, and could never remember whether I was to give my right hand or my left across. Roger would not dance at first; he said it was not in his way, and there were plenty without him, but just at the last, when everybody was laughing at him, he caught up little Jessie Lee, and declared she should be his partner.

Jessie was frightened at first, but Roger had such a way with children, they never could hold out against him; and when he had smoothed her little soft cheek with his great hand, and carried her in his arms to the top of the room, she was quite won; and he managed to twist her round wherever she ought to go, and ran with her down the dance and up again till we were all in fits of laughter, and Jessie most of all. I don't remember much about my partners: I began with Charles Morris, and one of Jane Shaw's brothers; and after that I think I danced with Mr Hervey, for he was staying at Longside, and was going to settle in the neighbourhood: so he had been asked to the wedding, principally to please Roger, who had made great friends with him. Altogether it was a very pleasant day, and when Leah was gone I enjoyed it heartily; but while she was present I fancied she was watching, and would find fault with me. We had a great supper at eight o'clock, and by ten every one was gone. Roger, Mr Hervey, and I, drove home over the down, in the Sandcombe tilted-cart, which Roger had borrowed for the purpose. Mr Hervey was going to sleep in our little room inside the kitchen, for he had business at Dene the next day. A beautiful drive we had, and when we reached the top of the long lane, leading out of Hatton, and were on the ridge, just under St Anne's, the moon shone out quite bright, and we could see the white cliffs over the sea nearly as clearly as if it had been daylight. I wanted Roger to let me climb to the top of St Anne's, and look at the moon-

light upon the water, but he said it was a great deal too late, so we only drove across the down slowly, Roger being afraid of the ruts, and were soon within the plantation gate. I believe I had talked a great deal more than I ought all the way, for Roger looked a little grave when I wished him good night, and said, 'You have a whirligig head, Trot; it's well there is not a wedding every day to turn it.' Mr Hervey seemed to think him rather hard upon me. 'It is a very merry little head anyhow,' he said. 'I don't know who has a right to complain of it, Ursie. Brother Roger would be very dull without it.'

That was kind of Mr Hervey, but not so kind and true as Roger's remark. My head was like a whirligig, and it was a good thing that I was not likely to be put much in the way of such excitement as I had had that day.

CHAPTER IX.

I MUST give but a slight sketch of the events which followed the wedding, and indeed of the next few years. William and Leah came back to Sandcombe, and Leah settled herself down as mistress of the farm, and carried everything with a high hand, which yet could not be complained of, as she certainly was a good manager, looking so carefully into everything that no one dared to cheat her. She used to boast that she had never lost even an ounce of dripping from the time she first became housekeeper. It was not a good kind of training for William. He was too much inclined to be close by nature, and now that his wife encouraged him in it he was even less openhanded than before. He was hard upon his labourers, and grumbled a good deal if there was any talk of raising their wages. One severe winter, however, there was an outcry all round the country, and then Leah persuaded him into being more liberal; for, hard though she was, she had a great notion of doing what the gentry did. This was after a public meeting about the state of the agricultural population, as it was called, when Mr Stewart, of Hatton, got up and made a long speech, and said it was a crying sin that the labourers should be kept down as they were. William rented some land of Mr Stewart, and was afraid to offend him, so the labourers had a shilling a week more after that; and Leah made a great boast of

it, and declared they were ruining themselves to keep the people from starving. I heard her say it myself one day, when she had come over to Dene, on her way to Longside. As I saw her seat herself in the little pony-chaise, and wrap herself up in her great fur tippet, I could not help thinking that if the poor were to wait till she denied herself even one luxury for them, they were likely to die of want.

Yet Leah and I were apparently very good friends. She was quick enough in understanding, and I think she soon saw that I was not to be put upon, though I was a child, and that Roger would not allow it. The only way in which she showed she did not like me was, by the difference of her manner to me and Jessie Lee. Jessie was very often staying with her,—it brightened her up,—for Sandcombe was a lonely place, and there seemed to be no prospect of any children to make it merry. I don't think either Leah or William cared much about this, for children would have been an expense and a trouble, and they were not naturally fond of them; but still in the winter time, Leah liked to have some one about when William was busy, and so she often persuaded her mother to send Jessie over to her. It used to provoke me, I must confess, when I heard her say, drawing up her head and shaking her curls, 'I have just sent for poor little Jessie; it will be a help to mother to be rid of her for a while, and we mustn't grudge the expense.' I knew well enough that, when Jessie was away, Mrs Morris was sad for want of her, and I knew too that Leah made full use of her when she was at Sandcombe, and took good care that, if she was an expense in one way, she should be a saving in another. The girl who helped in the kitchen was always sent away when Jessie came; and though Leah liked her cousin to dress herself in her best, and sit in the parlour in the afternoon, in case Mr Stewart, or the Shaws, or the clergyman from Hatton should call, yet she made her work like a scrub in the morning. Jessie had a meek temper, and never complained, and upon the whole I don't know that she had much cause. She was an orphan, and left without a penny, and the Morrises had quite adopted her; and if Mrs Morris was at all in fault in the way she brought her up, it was that she spoiled her. She was fond of Jessie for her good-nature, and proud of her for her beauty. Many pretty children don't grow up pretty; but this was not the case with Jessie. It was quite impossible not to notice her; she had such a bright complexion, a good nose and mouth, and such very soft blue eyes, with a kind of beseeching look in them, which

touched one's heart directly she looked at one. No one would have thought that she had come of common parents, and indeed her mother was quite a lady; but she married badly, and fell into poverty, and then her own relations cast her off, and she was obliged to depend entirely upon the Morrisises. Jessie bore the mark of her origin in everything she did and said. It used almost to startle me sometimes, if I happened to go over to Sandcombe early, and found her busy at house work, to hear her speak, and ask me how I was, and inquire for Roger. The voice was so sweet, I could have thought it was Mrs Weir talking to me, only that there was no melancholy in it. I don't think Jessie knew what melancholy meant. Her high spirits, indeed, sometimes carried her away too far, but she was never boisterous. I was always fond of her, though I could not make her much of a friend, for we did not care for the same things. She had very little education; reading she did not much like, and I don't think she would ever have written and spelled correctly, but that Charles Morris one day found out her ignorance, and took her under his own teaching. They seemed to think she would learn everything naturally, and she managed to make a fair show, though really she could do little well beyond house-work and trimming a bonnet. The life she led was too busy for her to feel the need of anything more, and she had so much petting and loving from every one, that she was ignorant of any want in herself. I don't know quite what it was which made her so lovable. No one could have called her sensible, and she was very much given to dress and gaiety when she could meet with them; but even when she provoked me with her silliness one minute, I could not help being fond of her the next. She had such a way of saying she was sorry, and she wished she was as good as I was. I suspect that won upon me, for I dearly liked to be looked up to. Besides, I must say that she was very grateful; the least little kindness touched her; and though Leah had been ever so hard upon her, I believe she would have worked her fingers off for her, because she was a Morris. She always said the Morrisises were the best friends she had in the world.

What did Jessie more harm than anything else was the acquaintance with the Shaws; but I may leave that for the present. It will be better to put down a few things about myself and Dene first. The property was not sold, as people said it was going to be; but it was mortgaged, for how much nobody knew—or at

least if Roger knew he never told. If it had been sold I suppose we should have been obliged to move, but as it was, we remained on year after year. Towards the end of every summer, Mr Weir, and his wife, and Miss Milicent, came regularly, and stayed till nearly winter; and I learned, by degrees, to look forward to this as the pleasant time, in spite of Mr Weir's pride and Miss Milicent's fussiness. My delight was to be with Mrs Weir, and this was not strange, for she was exceedingly kind, and did more for me in the way of education than I could possibly have expected. I had gone on learning what I could at Compton school, and upon the whole I think I was very well taught, and not at all backward for my age; but by the time I was fourteen, there was not much else which the mistress could teach me; and then Leah tried to persuade Roger to send me for a year to Hove, and to pay for it out of the money that had been put by for me. I don't think William would have allowed this; for though, as I have said, he was close by nature, he was not at all wanting in affection, and the money had been intended as a nest egg for me, and so he would have wished it to remain increasing till I grew up. But his opinion was not needed, as Roger stopped the notion at once; and now that I lived with him, his will was law.

When at last I was really too old to go to Compton school any longer, Roger thought it might do to send away Sarah, and give me the housework to look after. Leah objected to this; she said I was not born to it; that I had always been accustomed to a servant, and she thought I should have one still; but Mrs Mason took Roger's side, and said it was a very good plan; and Fanny should help me at the cottage, and I might help Fanny at the house, and she would look after us both.

That was one of the greatest helps Roger had in his care of me, I think he would rather have sent me to school than have left me at home with no one to think about me; but Mrs Mason kept me very strict, never letting me make acquaintances without her knowing it; and taking care that I should have no idle time upon my hands for gossiping and folly. There was very little variety in my life. Once Mrs Mason took me to London to stay with her for a week at a friend's house, and I saw all the chief sights, and had a glimpse of a world which did not please me half as much as Denc, though for the time I heartily enjoyed it; but this was all the change I had for several years. I might have found it a dull life, and required more for my happiness, but for Mrs Weir. Mrs Kemp, of Longside, was very kind to me, and Mary Kemp and I

became great friends ; but neither of them could quite give me what I wanted and found in Mrs Weir. Books were still, as they had always been, my great pleasure, and as long as I could go to the upper seat,—close to the down, and hidden by the shrubbery and the plantation trees, and read, I had no wish for anything else in the world. Mrs Weir soon found this out ; but she only noticed and helped me in my taste by degrees. It seemed as if she was afraid of showing that she took much interest in anything ; and for some time I was always sent away if I was in the drawing-room when Mr Weir came in. But by degrees I gained a better footing.

Mr Weir delighted in hearing anything he possessed admired ; he cared little what it was that was liked, or who it was that liked it, all he wanted was to hear people say, ‘Oh ! how beautiful !’ And so it happened that Dene being dull at times when no one was staying in the house, he used to amuse himself, when I was quite young, with seeing my wonder and pleasure at the garden, and the fountains, and the peacock and peahen, and the pea chicks, and the goldfish. It was a very honest pleasure on my part ; I was never tired of holding out bread to the peacock, and seeing him stretch out his beautiful long neck and snatch it out of my fingers ; and I don’t think the pleasure of finding the feathers ever grew less ; and being naturally rather free spoken, I used to say out what came into my head, and this made Mr Weir laugh. I believe we are all grateful to persons who make us laugh, whether they are men, women, or children ; and I can imagine that Mr Weir was so particularly, for his was not a laughing nature, if his countenance spoke truth. There was a sneer upon it almost always, and sneers and hearty laughter don’t go well together. When Mrs Weir found out that her husband was not likely to interfere, she made me be more with her. Before I left school I was in the habit of spending a great part of Saturday, after I had mended my clothes, in reading to her, and at such times she chose books which were likely to improve me,—history, and lives of celebrated people, and such things ; but what she liked most was to read her favourite bits of poetry to me, and to make me learn them.

I did not understand a great deal ; but even when the sense was beyond me, there was a pleasure in listening to the sound of Mrs Weir’s voice. It came over me like the distant rush of the waves upon the shingles, as I have heard it often, when standing by the oratory on St Anne’s ; or as the sighing of the wind

among the firs in the plantation on a beautiful summer's day, when a thin, gray mist floated over the level country, and every now and then the breeze rolled it away, and showed the lines of sparkling blue sea, far away beyond Hove. Tears have often come into my eyes as I have hearkened to those sounds, which seem so especially to belong to God ; and they have risen again and again unbidden, at the first words which Mrs Weir would read,—startling me with a sense of something that was not of this world,—an echo, it might be, of a voice that had been heard in paradise. Children feel these things, grown-up people reason upon them ; but I think children know more about them. As time went on, and I learned to know more of Mrs Weir's life,—her whole history seemed to me to be told in the strange, sweet, sad tone of her voice, as she read the verses in which she delighted. It was happy for me that I was not with her always. What I did see of her was good for me, I am sure, in many ways ; but to have lived always with such a person would have quite unfitted me for my real work. Roger was a little afraid of this, and I don't think he was sorry that I had Miss Milicent near, to prevent my becoming too much wrapped up in Mrs Weir and my books.

There was no fear of poetry where Miss Milicent had any authority. I don't think she had ever learned a verse in her life except 'How doth the little busy bee;' at least that was the only thing I ever heard her repeat. How she came to be so entirely unlike her mother I never could understand in those days ; but since I have seen more of the world, I have thought that mothers who have any one particular fancy, or taste, or even good principle, are apt to bring it forward on all occasions, and so their children take a disgust at it, and run the contrary way.

I know I have observed in religion, how persons who are very good and earnest themselves, give their children a turn against it, by continually talking about it. Mrs Weir did this, I suspect, with her poetry. She did not see what a different nature Miss Milicent's was ; indeed, I don't think she was quick at understanding any person's nature. She was always living in a kind of dream. One thing I must say for her,—Miss Milicent would have been a puzzle to any one. She was not like father, nor mother, nor cousin, nor any one belonging to her, that I ever saw, nor, indeed, like any one living but herself. Mrs Mason said one day that she took after her grandmother, and that might

have been the case. When I first saw her, she must have been about five-and-twenty ; but she was then as old in her ways as she was a dozen years after. I took it upon faith, when I first knew her, that she was a good woman, and that is saying a great deal ; for no faith that was ever heard of would have made me believe that Leah Morris was good.

It always seemed to me that Miss Milicent fancied she was sent into the world on purpose to set it to rights ; and I believe honestly that she began with herself, as far as her knowledge went. She was neither passionate nor sulky ; she always spoke the truth, and was thoughtful for the poor, and took a great deal of pains with their children ; and as for industry, she worked harder than Roger. I often puzzled myself in those days to find out what the fault in her was, and at last I settled that she was selfish. She wished everybody to do right, and be comfortable, but it must be in her way. She would deny herself like a saint to carry out anything which she thought likely to be good ; but she could not sit still, nor keep the room tidy, nor speak low and soft, because of her mother's wishes—whimsies she used to call them—that was her favourite word ; and I suppose Mrs Weir had a few such ; and certainly it was irritating for a person of Miss Milicent's age to be complained of as if she had been a child of five ; but then she ought never to have given cause for the complaint. God had granted her quick sense, and she should have seen her mother's little odd ways, and made allowance for them, and valued Mrs Weir for the many things there were to be valued in her, not set herself to alter them as she did. That was the cause of half the family troubles, because it destroyed anything like sympathy between the mother and the daughter ; and so each went her separate way and grew more and more strange, and wedded to her own fashion. Miss Milicent always took care that I did my work properly, and she taught me many useful things ; amongst others, to knit stockings and cut out dresses. She was clever at that, though she chose to dress so oddly ; and Roger was glad I should learn, for there was still an idea that it might be a good thing for me some day to be a dressmaker. After a time Mrs Weir employed me in doing little things for her in the way of altering dresses and in plain needlework ; and Mrs Richardson, of Compton, sent me common dresses to make up, and spoke for me to Mrs Stewart, of Hatton, and several other persons ; and at last I found I had more than enough to do ; though I never professed

to take to the occupation as a business. The comfort to me was that I was able in consequence to help Roger in paying my own expenses, and as I saved him a servant, and even gained something by assisting Fanny at the house when Mr Weir was at Dene, there was no notion of sending me away to earn my own living, which was what I dreaded more than anything.

Of course when I became so busy with my work I had but little time for reading, though I never gave it up entirely.

CHAPTER X.

THINGS went on in this quiet way for a long time. But some alterations were made in the place : a billiard-room was built over the storehouse, and a sitting-room and two small bedrooms were added to the house ; and some shrubs planted to enlarge the grounds. The billiard-room helped greatly to amuse Mr Weir when he and his friends came down. He took much more kindly to Dene after it was built, but I don't think it improved him. He grew more irritable and restless, and the people whom he brought with him were not such as were likely to do him good. Eating, and drinking, and billiards were the occupations at home, and when they went out shooting they mixed with persons who were not equal to them by birth, and whose characters did not stand well in the county. Young Mr Shaw, of White Hill, was invited to Dene every now and then, and the family held up their heads in consequence, and thought themselves very grand ; and the girls dressed more smartly than ever, and talked of Mr Weir as though he was quite one of themselves. But I knew better than that. Mr Weir would not have spoken to any one of them but for some object of his own, for a prouder man never lived.

All these things, however, affected me but little. I used to hear of what went on from Jessie Lee, who was quite one with the Shaws, but I followed my own ways, and lived at Dene without much to trouble me till I was two-and-twenty. Roger was then thirty-six ; quite an old man, and an old bachelor too. People used to laugh, and say that I should be a rich heiress, for Roger was surely making money all this time, and as he was certain never to marry it would all be left to me.

They thought he had an easy place and a quiet life. Little they knew of all the things he had to vex and fret him. Mr Weir was a most tiresome man to deal with; he had as many minds as there are days in the year; one week he would have things done, and the next week he would not; and what was worse, he changed not only about things but people. How he kept on so long with Roger was surprising, only I believe that he felt Roger was careful, and by looking after his affairs made money go farther than any one else was likely to do. But as for other people, such as the gardener, and the under-gardener, and the labourers, and even the game-keeper, it was a perpetual one going and another coming; and Roger had to give fresh orders and directions to each new person, because it was Mr Weir's will that everything should be done through him. I have often heard William counsel him to give it up and try something else, but Roger only laughed, and said, 'Where is there a place without trouble in this world? I know the worst here, and I don't know it elsewhere.' 'A rolling stone gathers no moss,' was one of his favourite proverbs, and it often helped him to decide when he was in difficulty; but there is no question that it was a very trying life.

The summer that I was two-and-twenty, Mrs Weir arrived about the middle of August, looking extremely ill, and Miss Milicent not in her usual spirits; but there was no Mr Weir. We settled down into our usual ways; Miss Milicent busying herself with the house and the garden, and going over to Compton to talk to Mrs Richardson about the school; and Mrs Weir living to herself, curled up in her easy-chair, working for the poor, never going out, and requiring me to go and read to her every evening at five o'clock; but Mr Weir's name was scarcely mentioned by any one, and even Roger seemed to take it as a matter of course that he was not coming, though he never told me why.

I had made tea one evening, and Roger and I were sitting down comfortably together, when we heard a knock at the door, and I went to open it. Mr Hervey was there, I shook hands with him, and welcomed him gladly, for he was now quite an old friend. He was often at Dene on business, and we met frequently at Longside, the Kemps being his relations, and indeed it had been said that he was going to marry Mary Kemp. He often came in in this way unawares, so we were not sur-

prised to see him, and we asked him, as a matter of course, to sit down and take a cup of tea with us. I noticed then for the first time that he was flurried. He answered rather quickly that he had not time, he had just a few words to say to Roger, that was all. I got up to go away, but Mr Hervey prevented me, and he and Roger went together into the parlour. It was dull to drink my tea alone, so I put the teapot upon the hob, to keep it as warm as I could, and went to my work. I was making a set of shirts for Roger, and I was obliged to snatch all the spare moments I could. I happened to be sitting with my back to the light, but presently a shadow darkened the window, and before I could turn round to see who it was, I heard Jessie Lee's gentle little voice, saying, 'Good evening to you, Ursie. Why are you all alone?'

I went to the window to speak to her and ask her what she had come for, but I drew back vexed, for Jane Shaw was with her, and though William and Leah found no fault with the acquaintance, I never could bear it.

'So you don't know me,' said Jane, laughing a little angrily. 'We don't see too much of each other, certainly, but I should not have thought we were quite such strangers.'

I opened the window to answer her for the sake of civility. I knew I had no right to show my dislike rudely; and yet I think any one who had looked at Jane Shaw, would have understood what it was that I could not bear in her.

A bold, cunning-looking girl she was, yet not ugly. She had beautiful hair, which she wore in large, long curls; and though her skin was freckled, it was very clear. She had a low forehead, which I disliked, quick, gray eyes, and a small mouth, with very thin lips; but she set up for being pretty, and because of that spent all her money upon dress, and I had heard her say that she was quite determined to marry a gentleman.

Jessie looked like a little angel by her side,—so young, and sweet, and simple,—only rather too smartly dressed to please me.

'Where do you come from?' I asked, for want of something better to say.

'We have been to Hove,' answered Jessie. 'I wanted to do some shopping, and Aunt Morris (she always called Mrs Morris aunt) gave me a holiday. We went in the chaise; and coming back, Jane and I had a wish to walk over the down to Hatton, instead of going round by the road; so the boy drove

the chaise, and we came on by ourselves. Jane is going to sleep at our house to-night.'

This was a very straightforward history, yet it did not please me. All I could say was, 'I don't think I should have chosen such a long walk after a day's shopping!'

'Mrs Weir is here, isn't she?' asked Jane, carelessly, and leaning against the window, determined, I could see, not to move.

'Yes; she and Miss Milicent came about six weeks ago,' I replied.

'Oh! and not Mr Weir. That must be a good riddance for you. But I heard in Hove that he came last night.'

'Hove people know more about our concerns than we do ourselves, then,' I said.

Jane laughed, and answered in a sharp, conceited way, 'Mr Weir might not think fit to tell you all he means to do: but take my word for it, he will be down soon.'

'May be,' I replied. 'He will find everything ready for him if he does come;' and as I spoke I made a little movement as though to shut the window, to give Jane a notion that she might go. Then a feeling of self-reproach came over me because I had been uncivil, and I forced myself to say, 'Perhaps you would like to come in and take a cup of tea. Roger and I were just sitting down, only Mr Hervey called and interrupted us.'

'Well, Jessie, what do you say?' exclaimed Jane, in her off-hand way; 'it would be a good plan, I think.'

She had not the graciousness to say 'Thank you,' but Jessie was very prettily grateful, and afraid they were giving trouble.

I put the teapot upon the table again, and cut some bread; and knowing that Jessie was fond of sweet things, I went to the cupboard and took out a pot of marmalade, some which Mrs Mason had taught me to make, and which had been much praised.

Jane had a sneer ready for everything. 'You live here in comfort enough, Ursie,' she said. 'But what will you do when Roger takes to himself a wife?'

'I shall see when the time comes,' was my short reply.

Jessie was quick in knowing when subjects were unpleasant, so she said, merrily, 'Ursie is Mr Roger's wife; he doesn't want any other.'

'Trust him for that,' replied Jane; 'Roger Grant is not made of different stuff from other men; is he?'

'Perhaps I think he is,' was my answer, half in joke and half

in earnest! ; for I could not have a tiff about Roger with a girl like Jane Shaw ; 'but,' I added, 'one thing I know, that when Roger does take a wife, it will be a sensible one.'

'Mary Kemp, I suppose,' said Jane, laughing.

'No,' observed Jessie ; 'Mary is going to be married to Mr Hervey.'

'Is that true?' I asked eagerly. 'I have heard it said, but never knew whether to believe it, as neither Mrs Kemp nor Mary owned it.'

'Miss Brown, the dressmaker, declared it was true, to-day,' replied Jessie. 'I went there to have my new dress fitted, and she told us that she believed Mary Kemp's wedding-clothes were ordered.'

'Mary Kemp is a very good girl,' I replied, 'and she will make a good wife. I hope they are going to live near.'

'More than I do,' observed Jane ; 'one set of Kemps is enough in a neighbourhood. What nonsense do you think old Kemp is about now? Father says he will be the ruin of the farmers, if he goes on as he does.'

'Giving his labourers a shilling a week more?' I asked, rather sharply ; 'that was his last offence, I know.'

'Spoiling the labourers,' exclaimed Jane. 'Joining with Mr Vincent, the agent, and making Mr Stewart throw away all his money upon their cottages. Father wanted a new scullery and coal-house put on for us, and he spoke to Mr Vincent about it, and the answer was, that he didn't think it could be done this year, because Mr Stewart had a plan for rebuilding most of his cottages, and giving them all two bedrooms. Such nonsense, when the labourers have gone on with one for the last fifty years, and never complained! And who is at the bottom of this but Farmer Kemp, with Mr Richardson of Compton to back him? They have been working at Mr Stewart for months. And there are we, cramped up without a decent place to wash up the dishes in ; and obliged to turn the wood-house into a coal-hole, merely because it is Farmer Kemp's fancy that his carter should have two bedrooms.'

'Mr Richardson was over at Sandcombe talking about it, when I was staying there last,' said Jessie. 'William Grant has two or three cottages of his own, hasn't he, Ursie? I knew Mr Richardson was begging him to see about adding to them, and Leah got angry ; and, when he was gone, said she wished clergymen would keep to their business of writing sermons, and not

trouble themselves with matters which didn't concern them. By the by, Ursie,' and Jessie spoke out quite brightly, as having escaped from a tiresome subject, 'do you know of any girl that will suit Leah to help in the dairy? She told me that if I happened to see you I was to ask. She talked of coming over herself about it; the girls she has had lately have turned out so badly.'

'They all turn out badly for that matter,' said Jane; 'it is in their nature, father says; and he never expects anything better.'

'So Leah says,' continued Jessie. 'She declares they have no sense of what is decent, and that there is no keeping them in order. Remember, Ursie, I have asked; so it is off my conscience.' Jessie stood up and put on her bonnet.

Jane waited still. She had a quick ear, and I suspect she caught the sound of the voices in the parlour, and thought Roger and Mr Hervey were coming in; and so they were. Their conversation had been much longer than was proposed, and it did not seem to have been very pleasant, to judge by their looks.

'Good evening to you, Mr Hervey,' said Jane, going up to him. 'I did not expect to see you, though I might have done so: you are here so often.'

'Business, Miss Shaw,' replied Mr Hervey, quickly, and a little sharply; 'it must be attended to, you know. I won't stay now, Ursie,' he added, speaking to me,—he always called me Ursie, having known me from a child,—'as you have company.'

'Nay,' I answered, 'you must have some tea; I have been keeping it hot for you; and Jessie and Jane Shaw have finished, and they are going to walk over the hill to Hatton.'

Roger had been standing by the window, thinking. He turned round then, and said, 'I am going to Sandcombe; if they would wait a few minutes, I might see them part of the way; and, Ursie, you could come, too.'

It was a temptation. I seldom had a quiet walk with Roger, except on Sundays; and I was not sorry to keep Jessie from being alone with Jane Shaw, though it might be only for half an hour.

Jane tossed her bonnet off, and laughed, and said she was always willing to have good company; and, since they were to be a merry party, it would be as well for Mr Hervey to join them, 'Unless he has business elsewhere,' she added, with mischief in her look.

I did not expect Mr Hervey to agree, but he did, without requiring any pressing, and I felt quite cross with him, thinking

how soon a man could be taken in by a forward woman. He and Roger drank up their tea quickly, and scarcely ate anything, saying they would wait for supper. I left Jessie to take my place, and pour out the last cups of tea, and went to put on my things; and when I came down again, I found that Jane had possession of Mr Hervey, and was trying to find out from him all she could about Mr Weir, when he was expected, and why he didn't come. She took it for granted that he knew all; and I saw from his manner that there was more on his mind than he chose to tell; but he warded her off admirably, not letting her know anything he wished to keep to himself, and yet joking all the time, so that she could not be angry.

CHAPTER XI.

WE were to have separated when we reached the top of the down, at the end of the turf road, but the evening was so pleasant we were tempted to go on farther, instead of turning down to Sandcombe. It was Jane who proposed it; she said we might cross the down to Hatton Lane, and then Jessie and she would soon be at home. Roger was doubtful; and whilst Jane was standing urging him, Mr Hervey whispered to me, 'Can't you come on, Ursie? I have a word to say to you.'

I walked on a few paces, being sure Roger would follow; Mr Hervey and I kept in front. He did not speak till we were at some distance from the others; then he said, 'You are not likely to be startled at news as some people are, so I may as well tell you at once that there is trouble coming, and that Roger may be wishing you to leave Dene.'

'Trouble upon us—money trouble!' I exclaimed, and I felt my heart sink, in spite of what Mr Hervey had said.

'Not trouble upon you, and not money trouble, at least as far as you are concerned,' he replied. 'But I told Roger I should like to have a little conversation with you, and show you part of my mind upon the subject, as regards Mrs Weir, and he was willing I should, though as yet we don't see matters quite alike.'

'He is going over to Sandcombe to talk to William,' I said.

'Yes; he trusts him as a prudent man, which is natural and right; and he would save you, if he could, from things which

might give you pain. But you are not one to care for pain, if by bearing it you can be a comfort to any one.'

'And by staying with Mrs Weir I may be a comfort to her,' I said. I seemed to understand it all in an instant.

'A woman is a help to a woman, let her be who she may; and Mrs Weir has been very kind to you, Ursie.'

'Very,' I said; 'I never had a better friend.'

'And she needs a return,' he continued. 'Ursie, did you ever hear Mrs Weir's history?'

'Only by bits. Mrs Mason has let out a little, and some things I have guessed at.'

'Some things are clear as daylight,' said Mr Hervey, sadly; 'but there is a good deal behind which only a few know, which I should never have known, but that my father was Mr Weir's bailiff, and had a great deal to do with his affairs, and his father's before him, and so we have become, as it were, part of the family. If I tell you now, Ursie, it is not that you may talk about it all, only that you may be the more inclined to be kind and understanding.'

'Of course,' I said; 'it will all be buried as in the grave, except with Roger.'

Mr Hervey paused for a moment; then he said, 'You know that Mrs Weir is a second wife?'

'Yes,' I replied, 'and I was told also that the first Mrs Weir had less money than her husband expected.'

'So it was said,' he replied; 'but she left him enough to give cause for his being considered rich, in spite of his extravagant habits; and, as perhaps you know, our Mrs Weir brought him money also. She was a Miss Mayne, and not above nineteen when she first knew Mr Weir; very lovely, like a little fairy, I have heard my father say; one can easily fancy that from what she is now. She had money of her own, left by her grandmother, and she was made a great deal of,—spoiled, indeed, by having everything she wished for; naturally she was full of fancies, and being delicate they humoured her in them; and because there was money at hand to buy everything, there seemed no reason, at first sight, why she should not have what she wanted. Poor thing! she has lived to know that there are some things which no money can buy.'

'And did she marry Mr Weir when she was only nineteen?' I asked.

'No! When she knew him first she was in love with some-

body else ; a young gentleman named Henderson. He was a clerk in one of the public offices in London, and likely to rise in the world ; but he had nothing of his own then except his salary. Every one saw they were attached to each other. The parents put no obstacles in the way of their meeting, and I believe there was a kind of understanding that if they both continued in the same mind they were after a while to be married.

‘And why did they not marry?’ I asked.

‘Because Mr Weir came in the way. I suppose he must really have taken a fancy to Miss Mayne, for he proposed to her only eight months after his first wife’s death.’

‘Enough to make her refuse him at once,’ I exclaimed.

‘And so she would have refused him, no doubt, if she had been left to herself,’ replied Mr Hervey. ‘But her father interfered. He liked the notion of a rich son-in-law better than a poor one, and what was more he was a selfish man, and as it turned out afterwards, had involved himself in difficulties, out of which Mr Weir undertook to help him, and so poor little Miss Mayne was sacrificed.’

‘It is all very well to say,’ I replied ; ‘but it never seems to me that any woman is justified in marrying a man whom she cannot love, let her parents urge it ever so much.’

‘Well! you are right,’ answered Mr Hervey ; ‘but when a person is put on the rack one must not be severe in one’s judgment ; and, from what I have heard, they set poor little Miss Mayne on a kind of rack. False stories of young Henderson were brought to her, and she was made to believe he was going to marry some one else ; and that, and her father’s urging, and Mr Weir’s attentions,—for he knew well enough how to make himself agreeable,—at last won her over.’

‘And did Mr Henderson say nothing for himself?’ I inquired.

‘They managed it all when he was out of the way. He had been sent abroad for a time on some matter of public business, and whilst he was absent the affair was settled.’

‘But he might have written,’ I said.

‘They took good care that his letters should never reach her ; yet she did hear from him at last. A note from him was given her, I have been told, on the day of her marriage, just as she came back from church. You can fancy, Ursie, what a wedding party that was. My mother watched the carriage drive through the town, when Mr and Mrs Weir went off on their journey

and anything so ghastly as Mrs Weir's face she has said she never beheld.'

'Poor thing!' I exclaimed; 'I wonder how she could bear it. I should have died.'

'Life is made of tougher threads than you think, Ursie,' said Mr Hervey, 'and I suppose we all in a way grow used to our sorrows. Just at first, too, Mr Weir was not unkind to his wife; she lived near her home, and had her old friends about her, so there was a good deal to soften her lot.'

'But Mr Weir is not kind to her now,' I observed.

'No; he grew jealous, without the slightest cause, except that he knew his wife had been attached to young Henderson. They met—Mr Henderson and Mrs Weir, I mean—for the first time at some gay party in London, and though I have heard it said again and again, that no one could find the least thing to blame in their manner to each other, yet no doubt Mr Weir perceived that there was pain on both sides. And so he grew angry and irritable, and I dare say she, having been spoiled, was not always wise in her mode of dealing with him.'

'She may not have been wise,' I said, 'but she must always have meant rightly.'

'Everybody believed that of her. But Mr Weir is a strange man, Ursie. If he dislikes or suspects once, there is no overcoming the prejudice. And so he deliberately set himself—at least, that is what people declare—to ruin young Henderson.'

'Wretch!' I exclaimed.

'Not far short of it,' replied Mr Hervey. I have that opinion of him, Ursie, that, but for the sake of Mrs Weir, I would never have done an hour's business for him. But I dare say he would make a good excuse for himself; it was all in the way of law, and therefore he called it justice. Mr Weir was engaged in some speculations,—he is always speculating,—and in the course of them, he and young Henderson were mixed up in the same concern. Henderson was not a good man of business, and ignorantly entered into some engagements which he could not conveniently keep. He begged for time; and there was no doubt that with time he would have overcome his difficulties. But his relations were poor, and he had no one to help him. Mr Weir urged the person with whom he was connected to press him. Henderson was in despair, for he was a strictly honourable man, and at last he ventured to write to Mrs Weir

and ask her to intercede. There was an allusion in this letter to past days, but not a word which might not have been published in the market-place. Yet Mr Weir's anger was terrible. They say that Mrs Weir even went so far as to beg him on her knees to be merciful; but his answer was that not an angel from heaven should persuade him,—and he kept his word.'

'And was Mr Henderson ruined?' I exclaimed.

'Yes. His friends came forward at the last with offers of help, but it was too late. His agony of mind, aggravated no doubt by all he had gone through before, brought on a brain fever, and he died.'

Silence followed for some seconds.

Then I said, 'She stayed with her husband still?'

'For better for worse,' replied Mr Hervey. 'There is no other choice.'

'I must have left him,' I exclaimed. 'There could be no law to bid one stay with such a monster.'

'Mrs Weir was wiser than you, Ursie,' he continued; 'she knew well enough that peace is only to be found in the way of duty. But that grief made her what she is. It wrecked her health and prevented her from paying attention to her child. It shook her mind in a certain way,—or rather, I should say, it so affected her nerves, that for a time she seemed stunned, and unable to take in common affairs. She has recovered in a measure, but the bodily weakness remains, and you must have remarked yourself, that she seldom speaks like a person who has an interest in this world's concerns. Only now and then, when any especial case is brought before her, if one is with her alone, her vigour of character seems to return.'

'I should scarcely have said she had any vigour naturally,' I observed.

'You are mistaken, then; she has a great deal. It shows itself now in a singular way; one might suppose that she would have become neglectful of her husband after he had shown such disregard to her feelings; but, on the contrary, she is, as you must know, even morbidly anxious to be obedient to him. Conscience, particularly as regards him, seems the only thing which is left thoroughly alive in her.'

'Perhaps,' I said, 'she feels that she deceived him by the very act of marrying him.'

'It may be so,' he replied. 'At any rate, duty to her husband is the one ruling object of her life now; not its motive

though, Ursie; there is no heart in what she does—how can there be?’

‘How, indeed!’ I replied; ‘but,’ I added, as I thought of Miss Milicent, ‘that must have taken place many years ago.’

‘So many,’ answered Mr Hervey, ‘that most persons have forgotten the circumstances, if they ever knew them; and Mrs Weir is generally considered now only an eccentric, nervous invalid. Yet it is not her life only which has been affected by them, but Miss Milicent’s also. She was allowed to go her own way, and at last became too much for her mother. She was clever and energetic, and Mr Weir found her useful in many ways, and brought her forward, and at last she took up independent notions of her own, and quite looked down upon her parents.’

‘Not upon her father?’ I said.

‘Yes, upon them both; for she was quick enough, and good enough, I will say that for her, to see through Mr Weir. It seems, Ursie, that when we put our hearts into our work it will tell in some way or other in the end, whatever blunders we may make. Sorrow, through God’s grace, made Mrs Weir very religious, and whatever else Miss Milicent might laugh at in her mother, she never laughed at that. Only, unfortunately, she made a bad use of the respect which she could not help feeling. She despised her mother for thinking too little of this world, and her father for thinking too little of the next.’

‘She has turned out to be disagreeable enough between the two,’ I said.

‘Yes; though there is better stuff in her than you might fancy; but she is not likely to be much comfort to either if trouble should come; which is the reason, Ursie, why I wanted you to be near Mrs Weir, if it could be, at least for a time. She would have more help from you than she would ever get from her daughter.’

‘But what is coming?’ I asked, quickly.

‘That is what I can’t say,’ he replied. ‘I am not at liberty; and I don’t want to urge you against anything which Roger and William may consider right; but they will be likely to think most of you, and I want you to think a little of Mrs Weir. I told Roger I should say this to you, and he did not object.’

‘I will stand by her through everything,’ I exclaimed. ‘She has been as kind to me as a mother.’

‘And you won’t repent it,’ he replied. ‘There is great com-

fort in this world in being able to help those who can't help themselves.'

I answered heartily, 'Yes,' and I felt the colour rush to my cheek, whilst my heart beat very fast. I could have fought against an army just then in defence of Mrs Weir.

Mr Hervey laughed a little, and said he felt I was a host on any one's side; but I think he had deeper and sadder thoughts in his mind, for he stood still, thinking and looking grave, which was very unlike him, and quite started when Roger, and Jane, and Jessie came up bantering, and asking what made us keep so far ahead.

We were at Hatton Lane gate then, and there we were to part company. Mr Hervey and I were a great contrast to the others. They were so merry, and Jessie said they had had a delightful walk. As she stood leaning by the gate, not willing, I could see, to go through, and saying good-bye to Mr Hervey, I thought what a pretty picture she would make, and I made Roger remark her, and he looked pleased that I should notice her kindly, and said that she was too nice a girl to be left to Jane Shaw; he wished I would become her friend. I took but little notice of his words, for I had no thought to give to any one but Mrs Weir.

CHAPTER XII.

ROGER and I went back to Sandcombe alone. Mr Hervey had some business at Compton, and walked home that way. William was out in the yard, giving orders to one of his carters; but he left off directly he saw us, and made Roger go with him to look at a new threshing machine which was just put up. He told me I should find Leah in the house; so I went in.

She was in the little parlour, alone and working. I think she was not sorry to be interrupted, for she was very gracious, and wondered why I had not been to see her lately.

I told her I had been busy, what with keeping the cottage in order, and cooking, and needlework, and that now the family were at Dene, there was more than usual to attend to.

'You should not make yourself a slave, Ursie,' she replied, 'Jane Shaw and I were talking about it the other day. She

says, and I quite agree with her, that the Weirs treat you as nothing better than a servant, and that if you were to hold your head higher, you might have as much respect paid you as she has.'

'A little more, I hope,' was my answer.

'You need not be so proud, Ursie. I don't see what right you have to look down upon the Shaws in the way you do; it is not at all fitting for a girl of your age.'

'I don't want to look down upon any one,' I replied; 'it is the Shaws who look down upon me. And, you know,' I added, laughing, 'that if people will walk about in stilts, one is forced to do the same to be even with them.'

'The Shaws are higher in the world than you are, or are ever likely to be, whilst you live shut up at Dene,' continued Leah. 'I don't mean to approve of all Jane does. I told her the other day that she went into Hove too often, and made herself too much noticed by her smart dress.'

'Yet you don't object to Jessie's going with her,' I said.

'Jessie's doings are not my concern,' replied Leah. (It was not strictly true, for she really had more control over Jessie than any one.) 'Not but what if they were, I doubt if I should think it wise to stop her, when every now and then she has the chance of a little pleasure. She must look out for herself. She will have to make her way in the world, and we must give her the opportunity of gaining friends.'

'Or a husband,' I said, sharply.

But Leah was not put out. 'Yes, or a husband! It would be a very good thing for Jessie to be married,—there is no doubt of that;—and she is more likely to meet with persons who will take to her, if she is allowed to see a little of the world, than if she stays all the year at Hatton.'

Leah said this so boldly that, for the instant, I was caught by her words, and felt she might have truth on her side; but a second thought brought me round to my former mind.

'For twenty husbands,' I said, 'I would not go to Hove on a Saturday, to flaunt about the streets with Jane Shaw, and have all the idle folks in the country gossiping about me.'

'You are jealous, Ursie,' said Leah, with some meaning. 'Jane Shaw is handsome enough and clever enough to have persons going after her who would never look at you.'

'Very likely,' I said, carelessly, not choosing to show that I was annoyed; though I must own that, as Leah spoke, I glanced

at the old mirror over the fireplace to see if I was really so plain that no one would ever look at me.

'We won't talk about it,' said Leah, in a quiet, provoking tone, which I knew meant that it was not worth while to argue with me. 'You will be sorry some day for your bitterness against the Shaws. Is Roger come over upon any particular business?'

'I think he is,' I replied. 'We walked over the down to Hatton Gate before we came here, with Jane Shaw, and Mr Hervey, and Jessie; and, now I think of it, Leah, Jessie asked me to recommend you a girl for the dairy if I could. Is Kitty Hobson going away?'

I said this rather to divert Leah's attention from Roger's business; and it served my purpose. She answered quickly, 'Kitty went yesterday; she turned out good for nothing, and I could not keep her. It is the case with them all. I wonder sometimes what is the good of all the learning the girls get at school; it does not teach one in twenty to be respectable.'

I could not help thinking there might be some fault in the teaching of the girls after they left school. Leah had only lately sent away an upper servant who was a great deal worse than idle, and whose character she well knew, but whom she kept because of her cleverness. Kitty Hobson had been under her, and no doubt had learned much evil from her.

I hesitated, and then I said, 'Kitty must have had a bad example since she left school.'

'No doubt,' said Leah, misunderstanding me. 'Her parents are people of no thought, and the cottage is a perfect pigstye; and they live all together more like pigs than human beings. As for Kitty, she never had a notion of behaving like a decent girl. Martha says it was a disgrace to be with her. If Mr Richardson would look after his school, and not spend his time in planning new cottages, we shouldn't hear the tales of Compton that we do.'

'It must be a hard matter to learn decent habits when they are all crowded together in that fashion,' I said; 'how many in a room are there?'

'Hobson, and his wife, and Kitty, and Charles, and the baby. Lately, they have put Henry Hobson to sleep in the little out-house.'

'And it is William's cottage, isn't it?' I asked.

'Yes; more's the pity. Mr Richardson was over here last

week talking to William, in a way that I thought very impertinent, about building another room, and at last William was quite put out with him, and said plainly that it was no use doing anything for people like the Hobsons. He might have said that it was no use giving money to Mr Richardson's school. He told me afterwards, indeed, that he had more than half a mind to withdraw his subscription,—you know we pay five shillings a year to Compton school ;—and I think he will be right since Kitty Hobson has turned out so badly, for it's a shame to think that she was brought up there.'

Leah always had right on her side, in her own opinion, but I could not help feeling for Mrs Hobson, who was a hard-working woman, and not at all strong, and I secretly made up my mind that I would go and see her, and inquire into the story before long. Perhaps, between Mrs Richardson and the Kemps, something might be done to give Kitty a helping hand, for I only understood, from what Leah said, that she was unsteady and careless in her habits.

Leah was peculiar in her ways of management in all these matters. She allowed things to go on as they might for a long time, and then suddenly, without warning, a girl was turned off. I felt with her that it would not do to keep one who was not well conducted, and I had often wondered at the carelessness which some of the farmers' wives showed about their servants, but I did think that some pains ought to be taken first to bring them into the right way. Leah saw that I took a different view of the case from her, and it made her cross. She said, pettishly, that she wondered what William and Roger could have to talk about so long, she should go and see, and she left the room.

I felt very sad when I was left alone ; what Mr Hervey had told me about Mrs Weir rested in my mind, and I had a feeling that changes and trouble were coming upon me. But even more than this, it always put me in low spirits—at least as far as anything could, for I was very cheerful naturally—to be at Sandcombe.

There was something about it which so often brought to my mind the story of the rich man and Lazarus. How William would have laughed if I had said so to him ! He rich ?—why, he believed himself to be just struggling to keep his head above water. A high rent to give for his land, upon which sums of money had been spent, his stock to be kept up, his labourers to be paid ; to say nothing of taxes, enough to ruin a man—land-

tax, and poor-rate, and church-rate, and taxes for houses and servants—it was absurd to speak of being rich ! And besides, if he was well off one year, who was to answer for the next ? Everything depended upon the weather, which, if it did well for one crop, was sure to do badly for another. What was good for hay was bad for turnips,—that every one knew. To hear William talk, you would have thought it was only by a miracle he was saved from the workhouse. But, in spite of it all, the Bible story would return to me. There was Leah, after her day's work, sitting at ease in her comfortable little parlour, having had a good dinner and tea, and expecting a good supper ; finding for herself just employment enough to prevent time from hanging heavy on her hands—for there was a new bonnet lying on the table, with the ribbon beside it with which it was to be trimmed—no one to interrupt her ; people about her willing to do what she told them ; a nice little chaise ready to take her where she liked to go ; a cart and a waggon ready to be sent for whatever she chose to order ; a husband whose great fault and misfortune was, that he let her have her own way. If it was not being rich, it was being quite comfortable without riches.

But it was all very proper and respectable ; there was no sin in it. I never heard, though, that the rich man in the parable committed any great sin : he only let Lazarus lie at his gate.

Kitty Hobson, however, was not like Lazarus ; she was good for nothing, so Leah said. Why was Leah to trouble herself about her ? Why might not Kitty be sent back to her home, to sleep in the little loft with her father, and brother, and mother, and the baby ? What matter was it to Leah that the girl could not learn decent habits if she wished it ? She was good for nothing already. What was the use of trying to keep her from becoming worse ? When Leah lay down to sleep on her soft bed in the wholesome atmosphere of her large room, why need she vex herself with thinking of the little crowded attic in which five living beings were to pass the night ? If the rain pelted against the window, why need she remember that there was a hole in the roof of Hobson's cottage, and that the drops would fall upon Kitty's bed ? If the wind blew, there were shutters and a curtain at Sandcombe Farm, the walls were thick, and the crevices carefully stopped. That was comfort for Leah ; and as for Kitty Hobson, she was accustomed to the breezes of summer and the storms of winter, for the cottage was so old that it

was more worth William's while to let it tumble to pieces than to attempt to mend it.

And then, if Kitty was worthless, it was no use to think of improving her. It might do Leah some good to say her prayers for she could kneel down quietly, and think seriously of what she was about ; but what was the good of talking to Kitty about prayers and the Bible ? She had, no doubt, given up any right practice she might have learned at school. There would be her father talking to her mother when she could have prayed ; or the baby crying, or Charles complaining that he could not go to sleep ; and when she got up in the morning it would be the same, or rather worse, for they must all be dressing in the same room, huddling on their clothes, crying out for breakfast, and scolding Kitty because the fire was not lighted. If she had wished to say her prayers, she could not possibly have found a quiet moment or a quiet place. But she did not want it,—she was good for nothing !

Leah might have been right ; but I thought of the rich man, nevertheless.

William came in alone, after I had been about ten minutes by myself. He sat down in his large elbow-chair, as though he was tired, and laid his hands upon his knees, and thought for some seconds. Presently he said, ' Hard times, Ursie, aren't they ? '

' I am sorry you find them so,' I replied ; ' I don't know that they are so particularly hard at Dene.'

' Just what I have been saying to Roger,' he replied. ' When you have a certain sum coming in, be it ever so small, you are better off than running a risk, as one must in taking a farm.'

' Is that what Roger thinks?' I inquired, hastily. ' He is come over with some plan, I know.'

' Roger has the Canada fancy again,' replied William ; and he fixed his eyes upon me keenly, to see by my face what I felt.

My colour may have changed ; I won't say that it did not. But I was upon my guard to conceal my feelings : whatever they were, they were to be told to Roger first. So I answered, quietly, ' Has he ? He never told me about it.'

' Then he had better come and tell you now,' said William ; and he rose up slowly from his chair and went into the kitchen, and called Roger and Leah, who were talking together outside the house.

I sat still. I would not appear impatient or put out ; but my

heart grew sick, and a pang went through it; for I felt that Roger had not treated me kindly.

Roger stepped into the room first; and before I could make up my mind to look up and speak to him, I felt his hand laid upon my shoulder, and heard him say, in a tone which he tried to make light, 'There's nothing settled yet, Trot; so don't be cast down.'

'I had rather hear it all from you, Roger,' I said, reproachfully. 'You shouldn't leave others to tell me.'

'I didn't mean it, Ursie; I didn't mean it. It is a thought just of an hour,—nothing more,—and it may go to the winds before to-morrow.'

'But I may be spoken to plainly,' I replied; 'I am not a child, and I can bear things.'

'Bravely, Ursie. Not a woman in England better,' said Roger; 'and you should have heard it all before night; only William let the cat out of the bag.'

'I was rather curious to see how she would take it, I must own,' said William.

'Ursie is a sensible woman,' said Leah, sharply.

People always say one is sensible when they are going to give particularly disagreeable advice.

'If you will speak out,' I said, 'I will show whether I am sensible or not. What do you all want me to do?'

'Stay and live here with us, if Roger goes to Canada,' said Leah, bluntly. And Roger bowed his head upon his hands, for it seemed he dared not look at me.

I don't think I answered directly; but when I did, I know that my voice sounded, even to myself, quite changed.

'I thank you, Leah, for speaking out,' I said. 'I will do what Roger wishes. If I am to be a help to him, I will go; if I am to be a hindrance, I will stay;—not here,' I added, quickly, for Leah was going to praise me for agreeing with her;—'I will do something to be independent; if there is nothing else, I will go to service.'

William uttered a low whistle of surprise. Roger only took my hand, and held it very tight.

'Then you will be the first of the Grants that ever so demeaned herself,' said Leah.

'Better come with me, Ursie, than do that,' said Roger, in a low voice.

'Yes, better indeed,' I exclaimed, vehemently; 'a thousand

times better, Roger, go with you to the world's end, than stay behind to be a queen. And why mustn't I go? I have hands and health, and care nothing for hardships. I will work to the last hour that God gives me strength; why mustn't I go?'

'Because it's all a chance,' said William, 'and Roger knows it. He may just as likely be a ruined man as a rich one.'

'Then we will be ruined together,' I exclaimed.

'That wouldn't help me, Ursie,' said Roger; and he looked up at me with what tried to be a smile, but it was not one.

'I don't see that there is a question of ruin for any one,' exclaimed Leah, rather contemptuously. 'Roger has money to set out with if he chooses to go, and no doubt he will do better at first alone. What is to come after may be left, if Ursie won't ride the high horse, and be too proud to find a home with her own brother.'

'I am not too proud,' I said, hastily, 'and I have proved it. Who has been Roger's servant up to this time? and who will continue so to his dying day if he will only say yes?'

'A man who sets out as a colonist can't afford to keep a servant,' said William. 'If Roger is bent upon this wild plan he must go alone, Ursie.'

I couldn't understand William's tone at all. I had fancied before that he upheld Roger's notion. He was going to say more, when Roger started from his seat and stood up before me. The sadness in his face was gone, and he looked like himself, fit and willing to brave the world. 'We have not been fair upon you, Ursie,' he said; 'you have been taken by surprise. We should have talked this matter over alone, and we will do it now. Leah, you have been kind in offering a helping hand; and thank you for it. Good night, William; you shall hear more about us tomorrow.' He walked out of the room, and through the passage into the yard, not once looking round to see if I was following him. William seemed thoroughly vexed. Leah was only rather grave; she just said, 'I hope, Ursie, whatever you resolve upon, you will consider the credit of the family,' and then she let me depart.

CHAPTER XIII.

INSTEAD of turning into the turf road to Dene, Roger said, when we reached it, 'The moon will be up in a few minutes, Ursie; we might get to the top of St Anne's and look at it.' These were the first words he had spoken, and I had not interrupted his silence. I felt that he wanted time to set himself right. That conversation had for some reason or other disturbed him, more almost than I should have expected. And it was a quieting walk along the ridge of the down; it was growing very dark, but the sky was clear, and one or two stars were to be seen gleaming very faintly. I could just distinguish between the trees the Abbey Farm, and a dark spot which I knew must be the tower of Compton church; and out in the distance, where there was a glowing sheet of yellow light along the horizon, the white cliffs stood up mistily, their outline mixing with the sky.

'Now, Ursie, give me your hand,' said Roger, as we stood at the foot of St Anne's Hill. The way was steep; he dragged me up after him, taking care to avoid the chalk-pit, and every now and then bidding me stop to rest,—though I scarcely needed it. When we reached the Oratory, he made me lean against the wall. The moon had risen, though as yet it cast no reflection; but a pale light was spread over the vast expanse of waters, and white curling waves could be seen dashing upon the shingles, and scattering their spray into the air. Roger took off his hat, and passed his hand across his forehead.

'We may well look at the sea, Ursie,' he said; 'it will be the highroad between us before long.'

'Never,' I answered, firmly; 'my mind is made up, Roger.'

'But not mine. William is right; it is a risk.'

'Then William should not urge you to go,' I said.

'He does not. You heard him call it a wild notion; he thinks I can stay at Dene.'

'And why can't you? We have one lot in life, Roger; I ought to know.'

'Mr Weir is a ruined man; or, if he is not now, he must be before many weeks are over. John Hervey knows it, and came to tell me of it. Does it startle you, Ursie?' and he put his arm round me, and drew me close to him and kissed me.

‘No,’ I answered, ‘it does not startle me; nothing that I could hear of Mr Weir would. But his wife, Miss Milicent,’—my heart was full, I could not say more; and John Hervey’s story and my own words came to my mind reproachfully.

‘It’s bitter enough for them,’ he said; ‘but we must think of ourselves, Ursie; or, at least, I am bound to think of you.’

‘And we can’t help them?’ I said.

‘Not without doing ourselves harm, so far as I can see now. At least I can’t.’

‘But I can, and that is what Mr Hervey meant,’ I said, ‘when he talked to me.’

‘John Hervey is against your going with me,’ was his answer. ‘Whatever he may have said about Mrs Weir is only second in his thoughts; his first notion is that you are safer in England, at least for a while. William, and Leah,—they all think so.’

‘And Roger thinks what?’ I said; and I leaned my hand upon his shoulder, and partly raised myself, that I might look into his face, and see clearly what he meant.

‘Roger is a fool!’ he said, in a husky voice. ‘Ursie, I can’t live alone.’

All the love which had been lying deep in my heart for years seemed, at that moment, to gather itself up into one overwhelming torrent. ‘Let the whole world be against me, and I will go!’ I exclaimed; ‘God made us brother and sister; He taught us to love one another, and it can’t be His will that we should part.’

He pressed me to him more closely, but he did not answer.

‘Is it not true?’ I continued, eagerly. ‘Have you anything to say against it? If God has joined us together, why are we to be put asunder?’

‘That is said of husband and wife, not of brother and sister,’ he replied.

‘And if I were your wife you would take me with you?’

‘I should feel it my duty,’ was the answer.

It was my turn then to be silent; neither of us, indeed, spoke for some seconds. At last I said, bitterly, ‘A wife couldn’t love you better than I do, Roger!’

‘Maybe not,’ he replied. The words must have struck him as cold, for he added, ‘You love me a thousand times more than I deserve, Ursie; but that is no reason why I am to take advantage of you to lead you into hardships.’

‘I shall walk into them with my eyes open,’ I replied. ‘I am

not a girl now, I am a woman ; I know what I can bear—everything, Roger, except you shouldn't love me.'

'Then you have little enough to fear in life,' he said ; 'but, Ursie, it won't do to think only of our love. There is a safer rule, though not such a pleasant one,—what we can afford.'

'I shall be no expense to you,' I replied ; 'and every one knows how useful a woman is in a new country.'

'Yes, in some ways ; but it is all an experiment. If I take you, I must pay your passage, and fit you out, and all our travelling will be doubled, and I must be more careful as to lodging. If I go by myself, I may find a shelter anywhere, I shall not care where I am ; but if I have you with me, I shall never bear that you should want comforts ; and then, if the scheme should fail, there will be the expense of coming back again.'

'Then, why go at all, if it is to fail ?' I said, rather perversely.

'Because it's the best opening a man in my circumstances can have.'

'And if you were married, you would still go, and take your wife ?'

'Even so ; a family man has a much better chance in a new country than an old one.'

'But you are not married, and you have no family.'

'No reason why I mayn't be married some day, you know, Trot,' and he laughed.

'No reason,' I answered, quietly ; but it seemed that a dagger went through my heart.

I don't know whether Roger suspected it, but he went on : 'There is no good in looking on into the future, Trot ; we have lived very happily hitherto, and, please God, we will be happy yet. My wife's wedding-clothes are not made, nor likely to be ; and, in the meantime, there is nothing I want but Ursie : and if all goes well, by this time twelvemonth I may be writing to you from over the sea, asking you to come to me ; and then I don't think you will say no. And you know,' he added, 'that a wife, if I had one, couldn't take up so much room but what there would always be a corner for you.'

He was a man ; he did not know a woman's heart, and he thought he had comforted me by those words.

'Then it is settled ; you are going,' I answered. I could not bring myself to say thank you for what he had been offering me.

'Not at all settled,' he replied ; 'it depends partly upon

William, and getting the money together. You know now a good deal is laid out upon his farm, and I don't want to put him to inconvenience. That is one reason why I said nothing to you ; I felt the plan might never come to anything ; and there was no use in troubling you before the time.'

'You would not have treated your wife so,' I said, reproachfully. He was very quick at catching any change in my voice.

'O Ursie !—jealous !' He laughed, and patted me on the back, as though I had been a child.

My pride was touched ; and I drew back from him. 'I only wish,' I said, 'to have common trust placed in me. If I am worth anything, Roger, I am worth that ; and I have never kept back a thought from you.'

'Nor I from you, Ursie,' he answered, gravely. 'It shouldn't have been so now if I had guessed for a moment that you would take it to heart. As to a wife, the notion is too silly to talk about. Twenty wives wouldn't do for me what my little Trot has done.' And then he gave me what I used to call one of his bear's hugs, and I prayed him to be merciful ; and said, laughing, yet being more inclined to cry, that I wouldn't wish him a worse punishment than one wife ; for he didn't know the least about women's ways, and he had been quite spoiled.

'True, perhaps, Ursie,' he said, thoughtfully ; and I felt comforted, though not happy.

We stood together for some minutes afterwards, watching the glimmering of the moonlight which was just beginning to mark a path upon the sea. I think we were both glad to forget for a while that there was anything else to be thought about. The light streamed doubtfully at first, seeming to catch only the crests of the waves, and then a cloud passed, and it was quite hidden. and a deep shadow rested upon the water ; from which, after a few minutes, broke forth at intervals glittering lines and bright islands of pale glory, till at length once more the moon rose high and clear ; and the broad sparkling pathway was traced in one unbroken flood of silvery light across the ocean.

'Do you see it, Ursie?' said Roger ; and he pointed to a tiny vessel making its way across the ocean. 'How lonely it looks !'

'Not lonely,' I said ; 'there is another following it. Now they are coming into the light ; they are close together.' I heard Roger sigh.

'They are going in the same direction,' I added ; 'they must

be bound for the same port. If storms come, they will help each other. You would not part them, Roger?' -

'It is growing very late, Ursie, we must be going,' was his only answer. We left the shelter of the ruined oratory; and as the cold breeze was felt on the open hill, Roger said earnestly, 'I shouldn't feel the chill, Ursie, if you were not here to share it. It may be better to be lonely after all.'

CHAPTER XIV.

I WAS awakened next morning by a loud knocking at the cottage door. It must have been about half-past five o'clock, for I was very sound asleep, and I always woke by myself before six. I waited to hear if Roger would move, and not hearing him, I supposed he must have dressed and gone out before, and as quickly as I could I went down-stairs myself, thinking that most likely it was Fanny come over from the house for something she wanted.

When I opened the door I saw not Fanny but Miss Milicent. 'Why didn't you come, Ursie,' she said; 'I have been knocking till I was tired. You are wanted; my mother has had a bad night, and says she must see you directly. It is too bad for a girl like you to lie in bed so long.' Miss Milicent, I suppose, thought that because I worked harder I needed less sleep than she did. I could see she was like myself, only just out of bed, for she had wrapped a loose kind of man's greatcoat round her, the sleeves hanging down helplessly on each side; and some locks of very dishevelled black hair escaped from under her garden-bonnet. I had learned to answer her, I am afraid, a little in her own tone; so I said, 'Does Mrs Weir want me before I am dressed, Miss Milicent?'

'She wants you at once; I have been up with her half the night. Why weren't you at home last evening? she wanted you then.'

'I had business at Sandcombe,' I said; 'I am sorry Mrs Weir wanted me last night, but I will be over as soon as I can be now.'

'And I shall wait for you,' said Miss Milicent; 'but mind

what you say to her, Ursie ; she can't bear to be contradicted ; you mustn't put her out, or she will be worse.'

Miss Milicent made her way into the parlour, and I went up-stairs again to dress as quickly as I could. It was not very unusual for me to be called in this way, though it was seldom quite so early. They all knew I was an early riser, and Mrs Weir every now and then sent for me the first thing to do something for her which she could not trust to her daughter. I must confess that she was at times a little given to whimsies. But Miss Milicent's manner gave me an idea of something more than ordinary, and my conversation with John Harvey had frightened me about what was coming upon the family. I could not dress half as quickly as I wished, my hands shook so, and Miss Milicent called to me twice before I was ready. I would not go, however, without my prayers ; they were a little shorter than usual, but they comforted me with the feeling that I had trusted myself and others to God's guidance for whatever might be coming upon us.

'I have been looking at your furniture, Ursie,' said Miss Milicent, when I came down-stairs again. 'Your room is crowded ; that sofa would be much better round by the fire-place.'

'Thank you, Miss Milicent, but it does very well where it is ; it is never used ; and Roger and I like to sit close to the fire ourselves when it is cold.'

'If it's no use, why don't you get rid of it? you might sell it for as much as four pounds, and the money would be useful to you in many ways.'

'I dare say it would,' I answered, 'but Roger and I like the sofa ; it was my mother's.'

I felt sorry when I had said the words. I always was sorry in those days, when I let out anything of feeling before Miss Milicent. I opened the door for her to go out, and she went on before me, not taking any heed to my observation. Before she reached the house she turned round and said, 'If ever you want to part with the sofa, I think Mrs Richardson would be likely to buy it of you ; she wants one.'

I do believe Miss Milicent meant it kindly, but it was beyond my patience to bear it, or rather it would have been, if I had not made it part of my prayer to be able to put up with her. I answered, 'Thank you,' very shortly, and kept at a distance from her, that she might not have the opportunity of saying any-

thing more. We went up-stairs to the lobby, and there something seemed to strike Miss Milicent, and she beckoned me to come to her into the peacock room.

There were the birds roosting on the trellis-work! Little they knew of the cares of life, and much I was inclined to envy them.

'I suppose, Ursie, it may be as well to tell you one thing,' said Miss Milicent, throwing open the window and sitting down by it; for the room had been shut up some days. 'My mother has had some uncomfortable news, and she may talk to you about it. But you are not to encourage her. It is nothing in which you or any one else can do any good. Just try to draw away her thoughts, and if she wants you to read a chapter in the Bible or so, I suppose you can stay for it.'

I answered that I would willingly do what I could. I had Roger's breakfast to get ready, and the kitchen fire was not lighted, but I would remain to be a comfort to Mrs Weir as long as was possible.

'Fanny can go over and light the fire,' said Miss Milicent, 'and she can get your brother's breakfast too.'

'Thank you,' I replied, 'but that would not quite suit Roger, I am afraid; I must go myself, if I can.'

Miss Milicent sat considering, which was not at all common with her. Presently she said, 'You are very much given to your own ways, Ursie Grant. It strikes me you might as well take a little thought for others. My mother has been very kind to you.'

'Very indeed,' I said; 'I wish always to show my gratitude; I will do all I can for Mrs Weir, but I am afraid I can't put aside Roger.'

'It is not wise of you, Ursie. Some day he will put you aside when you aren't thinking of it.'

'I am willing to wait till the day comes,' I replied: 'but we are wasting time now, Miss Milicent.'

Strange to say, that was a fact she needed often to be reminded of. Busy though she was from morning till night, she frittered away more time than any person I ever met with.

She stopped again in her persevering way just as we came to Mrs Weir's door, and said: 'You know that when Roger Grant marries, you will be obliged to leave him.'

'Yes,' I said, very coolly; but if she had given me a blow, I could not have felt the proud colour rush to my cheek more quickly,

I opened the door of Mrs Weir's room, and held it for Miss Milicent to pass, and in she went like a rush of wind, straight up to her mother's bed, and drew aside the curtain, without a word of preparation.

That was going against one of Mrs Weir's peculiar fancies. She never liked to be looked at in bed, unless she was dressed for it, and had on her pretty white muslin dressing-gown, trimmed with lace, and her best cap. 'I have been over to Ursie Grant, mother, and she is come,—here she is.' Miss Milicent pulled aside the curtains still farther.

'That will do, Milicent. The light troubles me.' Mrs Weir's voice was very weak, and she drew the coverlid over her face.

'It's only because you keep the room so dark always, mother,' replied Miss Milicent. 'If you would leave off having the shutters closed at night, you wouldn't be so fidgety. Ursie can't see to read, nor to do anything in this owl's light.'

'I wish to talk a little to Ursula alone, Milicent. I beg you to leave us. Is Ursula there?'

I drew near, and as I did so, managed to draw the curtain so as partly to hide Mrs Weir, and make her feel that I was not looking at her. Miss Milicent flustered about the room (it is the only word I know to express what I mean), putting the chairs straight, and moving things from the dressing-table.

'I wish to be quiet, Milicent. I should like those things to be left,' said Mrs Weir, plaintively.

'You can't see, mother; you went to bed in such a hurry last night, that Cotton had no time to put anything away.'

Mrs Weir resigned herself to her fate, and let her head fall back on the pillow.

'I will see to it all, Miss Milicent,' I said, going up to her, 'if you will just kindly leave it. Else I may be obliged to go back to Roger before Mrs Weir has had time to talk to me.'

'Well, yes! I settled that Fanny should go over and light the fire. I shall call her and tell her so.'

A most happy thought! it took Miss Milicent away, and she departed, slamming the door so violently, that I observed poor Mrs Weir put her hand to her head, showing that the noise gave her pain. We heard Miss Milicent about the house for at least ten minutes afterwards, up-stairs and down-stairs, ordering one and another. No matter whom she had to meet: there was the greatcoat with its helpless hanging sleeves, and the garden-bonnet to cover her.

Mrs Weir waited for some seconds to assure herself that the room was free from Miss Milicent's presence, after which, she said, 'Now, Ursula, if you please, sit down;' and I placed a chair just behind the curtain, and sat down. 'Thank you for coming,' she continued. 'I should have preferred not sending to you till after I had had my breakfast, but Milicent desired it.'

'Miss Milicent thought I might be able to do something for you, ma'am,' I said, 'and I should be very glad if I could.'

'You are very good, Ursula. I feel it. Will you kindly look for my other cap, and the little light shawl in the left-hand drawer; you know which I mean; and, perhaps, if it would not trouble you, you would just give me my hand-glass, and draw aside the window curtain a little, a very little. Milicent would open the shutters quite, though I begged her not.'

These were very common little duties. I had often performed them before; for Mrs Weir was very thoughtful about her maid, and whenever she kept her up at night, took care that she should have time to rest in the morning. I gave her the glass, and the cap, and poured some water into a very pretty china basin, with a pattern of green leaves and acorns round it, and handed her the sweet-smelling soap, and the soft-fringed towel, feeling all the time as if I was waiting upon a child, or even something more tender and delicate, something which would be likely to break if one touched it, her little hands and arms were so thin and white, and her fingers so taper. She had but few gray hairs, and her complexion was still very transparent. I don't think she showed her age at all, except in the marks beneath her eyes.

'Now, my eau de Cologne, if you please, Ursula; and I should like the little table to be brought nearer, and will you put the flowers so that I may look at them? and the purple morocco Testament. I thank you; that is quite right; no one ever does just what I wish as you do.'

No one except Miss Milicent had known Mrs Weir's ways as long as I, and it had taken me a good while to learn them. As for Miss Milicent, it was a matter of continued surprise to me, that she and her mother had not separated years before.

'I should like you to read to me, Ursula, but I am afraid to take up your time; perhaps I had better talk to you first.'

'If you please, ma'am,' I said. And now that Mrs Weir was in a measure dressed, I ventured to place my chair so that I might see her more plainly.

I noticed, then, that her eyes were heavy, and her eyelids red, showing that she had been crying, but she was trying to look happy. She was able to control herself wonderfully. I thought that, perhaps, if anything painful was to be said, it might be as well to let her prepare herself for it, so I offered to read the second morning lesson for the day. I knew that would soothe and give her strength more than anything I could suggest.

She listened with great reverence and attention, as was her wont, and when I had ended she said, 'Thank you, Ursula, it has done me good. Whatever there is to bear, it will not be for long, and there is a bright hope beyond.'

Then she paused, and the faint spot of colour in her cheek went and came, as it might have done in the face of a young person.

'You have heard bad news, ma'am, I am afraid,' I said, for I felt I must help her in spite of Miss Milicent's warning.

I was standing by the bed close to her. Poor lady! she caught my hand, and looked piteously in my face, and then she leaned her head on my shoulder, and cried like a child. And through her sobs came the words, 'Ursula, my husband is gone, and we are ruined.'

'Dear ma'am, I heard something of it,' I said; 'but it may not be so bad as you think.'

She drew herself away from me, and a flash shot from her eye. 'They talk of us, then,—they pity us. But why should they not, Ursula?' and her voice was tremulous again. 'We are all weak—weak—only mortals!'

'Roger had heard something, and Mr Hervey, too,' I replied, 'but I don't fancy, ma'am, the news is commonly known.'

'It concerns Mr Grant, Ursula,' continued Mrs Weir, her voice and manner becoming calmer. 'Milicent says he must go away from Dene, and you also. She tells me we must live in a little cottage, and not keep any servant. I don't think I could live long if Milicent waited on me; but I must try; we must all try to do what God orders. Only, Ursula, you will come and see me sometimes?'

I meant not to be silly, and I used to think that I could always keep my tears in, but I broke down entirely then.

'Milicent told me, last night, all we should have to do,' pursued Mrs Weir. 'When I could not go to sleep, she talked to me about it. I dare say it was right to look at the worst; and Milicent says she shall not care for having everything to arrange;

but I think, Ursula, I might have slept better if I had been left quiet.'

'Miss Milicent is strong,' I said; 'she does not understand what you require, ma'am.'

'Perhaps not; I know she said only what was true; but, Ursula, I should not vex myself with my own trials so much, if I knew more about my husband. Perhaps he is gone abroad; I ought to follow him. I ought to try and make him happier.'

'I don't think you need trouble yourself about Mr Weir, ma'am,' I began, angrily; but she laid her hand upon my arm.

'I made a vow once, Ursula, to love, and honour, and obey him. You have never made such a vow. You cannot understand it. But it must be kept. Do you think Mr Grant or Mr Hervey would endeavour to find out where my husband is? I might join him then. I think I would rather do so than live in the little cottage with Milicent.'

I could well understand that. Great self-sacrifice is always more easy than patient endurance. 'You are not fit to go to him, ma'am,' I said, 'if he is out of England. You would not be able to bear the hardships of travelling.'

'We should travel till we found him,' said Mrs Weir. 'Then we might take a house in some place where we were not known.'

I felt whilst she spoke so easily of what might be done, how little she could know what ruin meant, and I was aware that I had but a slight notion of it myself. I could not picture Mrs Weir living in any place without every comfort about her.

She continued, 'I thought perhaps, Ursula, that you would come with us at first, if your brother would spare you; I told Milicent that I would ask you, but she laughed at the idea.'

'Miss Milicent knows how many things I have to keep me at home, I am afraid, ma'am,' was my reply. It grieved me to say this, but she talked so like a child, fancying everything which she wished might be managed, that I saw it was necessary to show her the difficulties in her way. I could understand now why Miss Milicent had urged me to divert her mind instead of encouraging her to dwell upon her troubles. She looked very cast down, more I thought, because I was so cold, than because I did not say yes; so I added, 'Indeed, ma'am, you must not think but that I would do everything for you I could, though it would be wrong to make any promise without consulting Roger, because he has plans of his own.'

'You are very kind, Ursula. I don't want to be selfish. I told

Milicent so. She thinks that we ought to stay in England. But Mr Weir is my husband, I must not leave him. I should like to talk to Mr Richardson about it. Do you think he would come to me? I shall pray to God and He will direct me.'

She was very nervous and agitated, and her voice shook painfully, though the words still followed each other slowly and formally in the quaint fashion which was common with her. I could do nothing for her myself, and the proposal of sending for Mr Richardson took quite a weight from my mind.

She caught my hand as she supposed I was going away, and held it firmly. 'You will pray for me, Ursula. I want to do my duty, and I think you will help me, and God will not forsake me. I must remember that; I shall see a way by and by. I hope you will never know so much trouble as I have; but I must go to my husband.'

Those were the saddest words of all to me. There was no love in them, only a despairing sense of duty. I longed to ask her more particulars of what she had heard, but I remembered Miss Milicent's warning, and I felt also that it would be impertinent. Mrs Weir was very kind in giving me her confidence, but I had no right to ask for more than she chose to tell.

'I must go to my husband,' I heard her repeat again to herself, as I left the room, intending to see Miss Milicent, and beg her to write to Mr Richardson. This time the words sounded less sad. They came to me more as a lesson for myself. In her anxiety, her nervousness, and helplessness, Mrs Weir had seized upon the one point which came before her as a duty. It was a landmark in her difficulties; and I knew that I must do the same. The weight pressed more heavily on my heart when I thought of Roger and Canada; for I could see fresh claims starting up to keep me at home. But there is strength in duty; it is like nothing else. When troubles like quicksands are all around one, it is a firm spot on which to tread, and there is nothing so supporting to one's self as seeing others plant their feet upon it and stand up boldly. Poor Mrs Weir had done more for me than I could ever do for her. I went back to her again for a little while, but I was doubtful whether it was good for her to have me much with her. Being with any one to whom she could open her heart, excited her. She spoke freely of the money difficulties, and said that she had foreseen them, but it was evident to me that her husband had never been open with her respecting

them. About him she said very little. Never indeed, during the many years that I had known her, had she ever spoken directly or indirectly of the causes of complaint which she had against him. It was a sacred grief, known only to God.

I left her about seven o'clock, more quiet, and with a promise that she would try and sleep a little. Indeed, I persuaded her to take a few drops of an opiate ; and Cotton being dressed by that time, I was satisfied that she would be well looked after.

CHAPTER XV.

ROGER'S breakfast was ready at half-past seven ; he had been out almost before daybreak. I don't think he had slept well. I told him how I had been sent for by Mrs Weir ; and he seemed glad, upon the whole, to think that she knew the worst. And yet upon talking to him, I found that it was not the worst. Now that the truth had reached Dene, Roger felt himself more at liberty to speak out : and I learned from him, that Mr Weir was not only ruined, but that he had gone away with a stain upon his character. Strangely enough, that very business which he had made use of to crush young Mr Henderson had been the cause of his temptation and his fall. It had never been a very profitable affair ; but it gave him an opening for speculation, and therefore he liked it. Lately he had taken a more active part in the business. Large accounts passed through his hands, and now the whole concern had fallen to pieces ; and the accounts having been examined, Mr Weir was accused of fraud in the management. He was not at hand to answer the charge—he had gone off no one knew where. It was generally supposed he had left England.

A most dismal story it was, with scarcely a ray of hope or comfort, except that Roger believed a portion of Mrs Weir's money to have been so settled upon her that it could not well be touched. The Dene estate was heavily mortgaged ; yet if it were sold it was hoped that sufficient would be left to give her and Miss Milicent enough to live upon ; and it had been suggested that perhaps also her niece, Mrs Temple, might come forward to assist, as she had received much kindness from Mrs Weir's family.

‘But it will be a hard struggle, Ursie!’ added Roger, when he had given me all these details. ‘Mrs Weir has been so little accustomed to rough it; and I am afraid Miss Milicent has no notion how to make both ends meet, and will burn a ton of coals to save a rushlight.’

‘Penny wise and pound foolish,’ I said. ‘Yes; that will be very like her. I hope they won’t go far away from here.’

‘That you may be able to look after them,’ he said, quickly. I made no answer.

‘They may take a cottage at Compton,’ continued Roger, a little maliciously; ‘that wouldn’t be far from Sandcombe.’

‘I am not going to stay at Sandcombe!’ I exclaimed, with some anger. ‘I had rather live on a crust of bread in a garret, than be forced to be all day with Leah.’

‘We will wait and see how things turn out, Trot,’ replied Roger, quietly. ‘It does not do to make rash vows, nor to set ourselves against what God may appoint.’ He left the breakfast table, and went to the door.

‘You must not go away so, Roger!’ I exclaimed, following him, ‘I can’t bear it. Something must be settled, one way or the other.’

‘When?’ he asked.

‘Now,—at once. How can I go about my work all day, not knowing what is going to happen to me, or where I may be to-morrow.’

‘I thought that was what we were obliged to do always,’ he replied. ‘The settling which you wish for, Ursie, can’t be made in a minute. We must see what is going to be done here, and then I must find out a good deal more about Canada; and when I have done that I must look into William’s affairs, and see if I can have the money conveniently. Can’t you put it into God’s hands, my little Trot, and trust it?’

His voice and manner brought back the feeling of reverence and submission with which I had been accustomed to listen to him from a child. I said it was very difficult, but I would try. I only begged him to let me know the very moment that anything certain was decided upon.

‘My first claim always,’ he said, laying his broad hand on my head. ‘You shall hear soon enough.’

‘And you won’t set yourself against common sense, and make up your mind in a hurry that I am not to go?’ I said.

‘Just the contrary, Trot. I was going to walk over to

Compton this morning, to look at Hobson's cottage for William, and I thought I would call in at the parsonage, and have a talk with Mr Richardson about it all.'

'You will meet him,' I said; 'he will be coming here to see Mrs Weir.'

'So much the better; I shan't have to go out of my way. Hobson's cottage is a good way off from the parsonage.'

'Here is the boy coming back from Compton with a message from Mr Richardson!' I said. 'We had better wait and hear what it is.'

Roger went across to the house, and I began putting away the breakfast things. I could not bear, that morning, to stand still and think, even for a moment.

Roger came back again very soon. 'Mrs Richardson sends the answer,' he said. 'Her husband has to be at Longside at ten o'clock, and after that he will come on and see Mrs Weir. In that case, Ursie, I had better go to Longside directly, or I shall miss him; for I can't wait for him here. William made an appointment with me at Hobson's.'

'And you might take me with you,' I replied; 'I have some business with Mary Kemp, which I was going to do this afternoon. We are to have cold meat for dinner, so it won't signify when I go; and cook, at the house, will boil us some potatoes.'

'Make haste, then, child. I have been wasting more time here now than I ought. But I shall like to have you with me,' was added, kindly.

I put my bonnet on directly, and went over to ask cook about the potatoes, and I thought too that I would inquire about Mrs Weir. Not that I meant to stay at home because of her, unless there was some very special reason. Though Leah said I was treated as if I was a servant of the family, I had always taken care to show my own independence. Mrs Weir herself had taught me that. She said to me one day, when, by some accident, I had let out a little of what I felt about Jessie Lee, and the way Leah went on with her, 'Ursula, our right will always be given us sooner or later, if we choose to claim it in a proper manner; and if we do not, we have no reason to quarrel with others for that which is our own fault.' I think she had learned this from experience. If she had stood out more against her daughter's tyrannising ways, Miss Milicent would never have got the upper hand as she had done. Things being as they were, Mrs Weir felt she had no right to complain. At any rate, I had profited

by the lesson, and had never given in to Miss Milicent, nor even to Mrs Weir, as I might have done otherwise. Having so many little fanciful ways, Mrs Weir might have taken up a great deal of my time if I had. We were all the better friends for my independence. I suspect there is no foundation for friendship between persons of any rank, unless there is a feeling of respect which prevents either party from taking liberties, or being encroaching.

As it happened, my going or staying just then was a matter of no consequence, for Mrs Weir had fallen asleep, and Cotton was with her ; so I left a message to tell her when I thought I should be back, and then Roger and I set off for Longside.

It was about three-quarters of a mile from Dene, by a tolerably direct road—Sandy Lane as we called it—which began just after we passed the gate opening from the wide pasture land immediately about Dene. That piece of land which was neither field nor down, but only a kind of hilly common on which cattle or sheep might feed, was one thing which made Dene different from other places. It was like the sea separating it from the rest of the world. The road through it was private, and no one but ourselves seemed to have any business with Sandy Lane ; whilst, standing upon such high ground, we looked out, as it were, upon the world.

Roger was not very talkative that morning ; he walked on so fast that I could scarcely follow him. At length he said abruptly, 'Have you thought at all, Ursie, of what you will do in case we should make up our minds that it is right to separate?'

'No,' I said, 'I won't think. I can't make up my mind, whatever others may.'

'It would be better,' he said, 'and kinder to consider ; and if you are so vehement against the notion, ten to one but it will come to pass. John Hervey thinks you might be better staying with Mrs Weir, even if she could only afford to keep you, than you would be at Sandcombe.'

'I should be better living on the common by myself than I should be at Sandcombe,' I replied ; 'Leah and I could never help coming to a quarrel ; and she does not want me. There is Jessie always to be had.'

'If you were there you might be a help and a friend to Jessie,' he said.

'Not I, Roger,' and I stopped short, and spoke almost angrily, 'Jane Shaw is in the way. What am I against her?'

'If the Shaws were only over the sea!' he exclaimed, vehemently. 'They are a curse to the country.'

The speech was so different from his usual gentle way of judging people that I looked at him in surprise. 'You don't know the mischief they are up to, Ursie,' he continued. 'Pity forbid you should. John Shaw is a scamp, and Jane'—

'Is what?' I asked.

'A lady, according to her own notions,' he answered, laughing; but there was something bitter and mocking in his tone.

'That is she, I do believe,' was my exclamation, as I looked down the lane, and saw two people coming towards us.

'You are as blind as a beetle, Trot. It is John Hervey and Mary Kemp. I dare say they were going up to Dene to see if they could do any good there. John Hervey is set upon helping Mrs Weir in some way. He has wonderful thought for such a light-hearted fellow as he is.'

'Yes, he is very good-natured,' I said, and I watched him and Mary with a kindly feeling as they came towards us, and thought what a pleasant couple they would make; though Mary was not what many men would have taken to. She was plain, and had a frightened, shy, stammering way with her, which it was difficult to get over.

'Well met,' exclaimed John, when we were within hearing of each other. 'Mary and I were on our way to you. Ursie, how did you get home last night? Roger and you didn't lose your way upon the down, I hope.'

'We were not late, and there was a moon,' I said, shortly. I could not quite bear any allusion to last evening. John must have seen my face alter, for his manner changed directly. 'We may spare ourselves the trouble of our walk, Mary,' he said, 'if Roger and Ursie are come to tell us all we want to know.'

'I was going to inquire for Mrs Weir,' observed Mary, timidly.

'And Ursie will tell us about her, no doubt,' said John, and he turned to walk back. 'Were you going to Longside?'

'Yes,' said Roger, 'to see Mr Richardson, if he is there.'

'You will find him in full parley with the farmer. They have brought over Mr Stewart, of Hatton, between them, and we have been planning cottages for the last hour. If Dene is to be sold I wish Mr Stewart may buy it.'

'Jane Shaw says that Captain Price, the young man who was

here some time ago with Mr Weir, has his eye upon it,' said Mary, in a tone so low that she could scarcely be heard.

'What can Jane Shaw know about the matter?' I asked, quickly. 'Captain Price is not likely to have told her.'

'Jane Shaw is going to be married to Captain Price,' said Mary.

'What, Mary? what?' John Hervey actually caught hold of her arm; and Roger said more respectfully, 'It must be Hove talk, it can't be true.'

'I don't know; I am told that Jane says it,' said Mary. She seemed afraid to assert the fact more strongly, even upon such authority, when the others doubted.

'I don't see why it shouldn't be,' I said quickly; 'they are much of a piece. Captain Price, as far as I ever saw anything of him, is not any better for a gentleman than Jane Shaw is for a farmer's daughter. I don't see why they shouldn't make up together.'

'Ursie, you are sharp,' observed Roger.

John Hervey supported me. 'Ursie is right,' he said, 'in one way; they are neither of them good in their station, and so they might just as well be out of it. Captain Price has little of a gentleman belonging to him, except it may be his birth; and as for Jane, it is difficult to say what she is; certainly nothing that is a credit to any one who has to do with her.'

'Jane thinks that to marry a gentleman will make her a lady,' said Mary.

'Let her try!' exclaimed Mr Hervey, laughing. Then a moment afterwards he added, 'What provokes me is, that people can't see their own respectability, since they think so much about it. Where is there a man in all the country more respected than your father, Mary?—and I may say your father's daughter, too,' he added, looking at her and smiling. 'Where is there a family that has more influence? And yet where is there a truer, honester, sturdier old English farmer, than Farmer Kemp?'

Mary looked thoroughly pleased, and said she did think her father was respected.

'Isn't he!' said Roger, heartily. 'If you were just to hear what I hear said of him everywhere,—amongst high and low, rich and poor,—you would feel it an honour to bear his name.'

'Perhaps I do feel it so,' said Mary. She smiled rather archly, and I thought she looked quite pretty.

I had it on my lips to say that it was more than any of old Mr Shaw's daughters could feel for him, but something stopped me. No doubt I was inclined to be sharp, and Roger often gave me a hint to keep a watch over my tongue.

'There is the old farmer out in the field by the hay-rick!' exclaimed Mr Hervey, pointing to a rick in a field at some little distance; 'and I think—yes, Roger—that is Mr Richardson with him. If you want to catch him, you had better be off, or you will miss him.'

Roger took the hint. I think his heart was full, and he longed to have all his troubles out with Mr Richardson. He strode forward like a giant, and was over the gate and across the field before we had reached the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

LONGSIDE was much larger than Sandcombe, and more of a manor farm. Fronting the road, indeed, the old brick house, and the farmyard, and the barns were such as might be met with anywhere, but on the other side, looking into the garden, it was a place of greater pretension. The Shaws had lived there before they went to White Hill, and old Mr Shaw had tried to make it look as much like a regular country-house as he could; and a good deal of money, I believe, had been spent by him and the landlord in improving it, and laying out the garden. Farmer Kemp took it as it was, and let everything stay, though it could not have been much to his taste. But his notion, as I once heard him say, was, that if a house did not make a gentleman, neither did it make a farmer. Folks would soon see what he was, and what he wished to be, and though other people had spent money in building up follies, he saw no reason why he was to waste his in helping to pull them down. He was more to be praised for that piece of economy than for many other things which men commended him for. It was a greater sacrifice to him to bear with what looked like being grand and set up, than it would be for most persons to bear with things that are mean.

But Farmer Kemp's wish was always to be, not to seem; his countenance showed that. Every line in it told of truth.

And a handsome face it was, too ! It struck me that day particularly, as we drew near, and he came to meet us with his old English greeting, putting all his heart into the shake of the hand.

Being in the open air so much had tanned and reddened his complexion, but there was a freshness about it still, though he must have been upwards of sixty. His hair was quite white, and thin, and long, which gave him the look of even an older man than he was ; but his blue eyes were as bright as ever,—as full of life and eagerness,—and his mouth, though the smile was singularly good-natured, proved that age had not yet weakened his spirit of determination. Farmer Kemp was no waverer nor doubter. He knew what he meant to do, and he did it ; and even when people quarrelled with him they respected him.

‘Why, Mary, lass, you are come back soon !’ he said, after he had spoken his few kind words of welcome to me. ‘I thought you were gone up to Dene to be useful.’

‘Ursie doesn’t think there is any way of being useful just now, father,’ said Mary. ‘Mrs Weir has heard everything, and keeps up tolerably.’

‘You should have gone in, though, child ; I would have had you see Mrs Mason. It will be hard times with Mrs Weir and Miss Milicent,’ he added, turning to me ; ‘they are away from their own kith and kin, and they are not over friendly with the gentry round, except it may be with Mr Richardson, who has a short purse, and a small house, and a large family. If it came to the point, there might be more real help for Mrs Weir to be had from Longside than from Compton, only it might not suit her to see it.’

‘Mrs Weir is not proud,’ I said ; ‘at least, I don’t think so.’

‘Poverty is the touchstone of pride, so I have heard say,’ replied the farmer ; ‘but come in, Ursie, and tell us more about it. My good woman and I have been talking about you this morning, thinking what an upset there would be for you from all this.’

‘It is pleasant to know that some persons can take thought for one,’ I said ; and I felt my eyes filled with tears. I don’t know what there was in Farmer Kemp’s manner which made me always feel what a happiness it would be to have an earthly father.

‘So you are sad, child, are you ?’ he answered. ‘Cheer up ;

rain one day, sunshine the next. Come in, and we'll have it all out. Why, there's Roger off with Mr Richardson! What is that for? and we had not half settled our business.'

'Indeed!' observed Mr Hervey, 'it was all but done when Mary and I set off.'

'I tell you what, man,' said the farmer, quickly, 'it wasn't begun. Give me money in hand, and bricks and mortar, and I will say something to you; but we have not brought Mr Stewart to that point yet.'

'He promises,' said John Hervey.

'Promises! promises!' Farmer Kemp repeated the words slowly. 'When you have lived as long as I have, John, you will learn how to value promises, even those of good men; Mr Stewart, of Hatton, being one,—at least, as goodness is reckoned now. I have been treated with promises for the last fifteen years; and shall I tell you what I think of them? They are uncommonly like the straw a day which the old woman's cow was fed upon till she died.'

We all laughed; but John Hervey said he had a better opinion of Mr Stewart than to think he was not going to keep his word.

'Well! yes,—well! he will keep it in the letter, I grant you. Whilst he has Mr Richardson to back him, and me knocking at his door, he can't well do otherwise. But he is not a man to go of his own accord against what he considers his interest. If he was, he wouldn't have let things come to the pass they are. He would never have needed our eyes for spectacles to help him to see that he can't make a poor, ignorant man a Christian by forcing him to live like a heathen. Why, there are cottages on the Hatton estate which aren't two degrees better than my pigsty; and there is he, with his five thousand a year, crying out about the expense of rebuilding them, and threatening—what do you think now, John, he threatens?' and Farmer Kemp stopped as we were about to enter the house, and drew John Hervey aside.

'We had better go in,' said Mary to me, in her quiet voice.

But I was curious, and something better than curious—interested; for I saw the working of John Hervey's face, and I knew that whatever Farmer Kemp might be telling him was giving him pain.

I wondered that Mary seemed to care so little for it. She watched them for an instant, and then said, composedly: 'Mr

Stewart told father that if Hatton was such an expense to him, he should sell it, and he knew a person willing to buy it. And I can tell who that is,' added Mary, with a little more of life in her tone; 'it's Captain Price.'

'What! he that is to marry Jane Shaw? It can't be,' I exclaimed. 'Dene and Hatton! He would be the lord of the country.'

'Father says it,' was Mary's reply.

'And you don't care about it? You aren't worried about it?' I exclaimed. 'Mary, you are a wonder.'

'It is not come yet, and it mayn't come at all,' said Mary. 'When it does it will be time enough to fret.'

That was very true; but somehow the words did not quite come home to me just then, and when I looked at John Hervey again, I thought less of Captain Price, and the chance of his buying Hatton, than of what John would do if he took to himself such a quiet wife.

'You will stay now and rest, Ursie,' said Mary, opening the door for me. 'Mother is in the kitchen, most likely, but she will be glad to come into the parlour and see you.'

Mary left me in the passage, for I knew how to find my way to the parlour—a pleasant little three-sided room, having cupboards all round the walls, and a cheerful-looking corner fireplace. When Longside was built it was intended for a house-keeper's room.

Mary had much more taste than William's wife, and though the room was not by any means as large, and not half as well furnished as the great parlour at Sandcombe, it was much more comfortable. There were flower-pots in the window-seat, and flowers on the table, and over the mantelpiece; and Mary was not, like Leah, ashamed of homely work, and so it was lying about ready to be taken up; whilst some books near it showed that there was leisure at Longside for something besides mere drudgery. One of the books was a Bible; I think Mrs Kemp, and Mary, and her two little sisters, generally read together the lesson for the day in the New Testament, some time in the course of the morning.

Mrs Kemp came in almost immediately. In her way, she was as clever and shrewd as her husband, and quite as good; and as for her kind-heartedness, there was no end to it. The good woman, as Farmer Kemp always called her, was never known to forget a friendly word or a friendly thought for any one. She

was always especially considerate for me. I suspect she felt for me because I was an orphan, for she had known herself what it was to be brought up without father or mother. Perhaps it might have been that which made her so careful about the young girls who came to her as servants, or had anything to do with the farmwork. I have often known people object to take girls who have been at farm-service, thinking they might have learned evil there, but it was never so with Mrs Kemp's girls; she made herself their friend, and kept them out of temptation, as she would her own daughters; until it began to be considered quite a recommendation in the neighbourhood to have worked at Longside.

'Early, Ursie, but always welcome,' was Mrs Kemp's greeting, as she smoothed down her white apron, and pulled down and fastened the sleeves of her dress, which she had turned up, I suppose, whilst assisting in the kitchen. What a round, bright-coloured, good-humoured face hers was! quite pretty still, and almost young. I could not help kissing her, though kissing was not very much in my way with most people.

'Farmer and I spent a good half-hour, this morning, talking about you and things at Dene,' continued Mrs Kemp, drawing her chair close to mine. 'I should have been up myself, only I thought it might be taken for a liberty, as I don't go there often; so I sent Mary, making sure she would see Mrs Mason, if she couldn't get a glimpse of you. What can we do for you now?'

'Nothing,' I said; 'nothing now, at least. Roger is gone to talk to Mr Richardson about it all.'

My face must have shown my feelings—though, the moment before, I had made a strong resolution against betraying them.

'Ah! poor child; yes. Dear heart! don't take on so. Roger can't go to a better friend. So it is all up with you, is it; and you must leave Dene? I thought as much, poor child!—poor child!'

'I don't know; I can't say what we must do,' I exclaimed; and the sorrow rose up in my heart, like a great wave about to rush in upon the shore. But it broke inwards, and I was thankful for it.

'He will find another place; you will have a home again very soon,' continued Mrs Kemp. 'Such a trusty, worthy young man as he is, and knowing so much about everything! Not that it will be like Dene, where you have lived so long.'

I shan't care for anything,' I said, 'as long as Roger and I

are together.' I could not allude more clearly to the Canada project without knowing whether Roger would like it.

But the world always knows more of one's affairs than one suspects; and Mrs Kemp jumped to my meaning in an instant.

'Ah! then it's true!' she exclaimed; 'and he's bent upon going off by himself. But he mustn't do it, Ursie; he must think of you.'

'He does think of me,' I answered, quietly. 'It is that which keeps him back now. He is gone to talk it over with Mr Richardson.'

'And he will take out a wife with him, I suppose,' continued Mrs Kemp, thoughtfully; 'or he will find one there for the asking. Well! young men must settle themselves.'

My heart sank. Mrs Kemp, with all her sympathy, was like the rest of the world; she could not enter into griefs out of her own line. A happy wife herself, she was unable to comprehend that any pang could be caused by the prospect of seeing others happy also.

I faced the subject boldly, and, in a proud tone, I said, 'If Roger wants to marry, and go to Canada, he may depend upon it I shall never be the one to stand in his way.'

'You might go with him, whether he is married or not,' said Mary.

Mrs Kemp interposed. 'No, Ursie; don't be tempted in that way. When people marry, they are best left to themselves; especially at the beginning. After they have gone on some time, and become used to each other's ways, and learned all there is to learn, a sister or an aunt may fit in well enough, particularly when there are children, and relations can make themselves useful. But at first setting off, depend upon it it's best to give young married folks a push into the world, turn them round three times, and leave them to shift for themselves. Having no one else to turn to, they are forced then to keep close to each other.'

'As if they wouldn't do it naturally,' said Mary, with a shy laugh.

'That is as may be,' replied Mrs Kemp, laughing herself; 'I am not going to let you girls into those secrets. Only one thing I will say to you, that if you do get a good husband, you will love him better at the end of twenty years than at the beginning, let his faults be what they may.'

Mary was silent. I felt that she was probably thinking of

John Hervey, and something like a pang of envy crossed me ; for I was sure of him, at least, that, know him ever so long, one should only learn to honour him the more.

The conversation wandered to different subjects after this. Mrs Kemp made me tell her everything I could about Mrs Weir, everything, that is, which could be told without betraying secrets. I found that the state of Mr Weir's affairs had been suspected—almost known for certain, indeed—in the neighbourhood many weeks before ; and it had been no matter of surprise to any one but myself that Mrs Weir and Miss Millicent should come to Dene without him.

Many stories were afloat,—most of them of a disagreeable kind,—and such as made it doubtful whether he could ever show his face in England again ; but that which Mrs Kemp, and the farmer also (for he came in and joined in the conversation) took most to heart was, the prospect of the Dene estate falling into the hands of Captain Price.

Whilst poor Mrs Weir lay on her bed, unable to take any thought for her affairs, the world had arranged them for her, and in a very likely, sensible way, according to its own ideas. Captain Price had a good deal of ready money, and he was going to marry Jane Shaw ; and Jane lived near Dene, and Dene must be sold, or else Mrs Weir would have nothing to live upon. These facts were undeniable ; so the kind world put them all together, and settled the business comfortably ; and most of our acquaintances looked at Jane Shaw, and thought she was luckier than one girl in a thousand ; and Farmer Kemp and his wife looked at Dene, and the tenants and labourers, and sighed.

I sighed too, when I heard Farmer Kemp talk that morning. He was a man who could not rid himself of an idea when once he was possessed of it, and who could scarcely help forcing it, perhaps, now and then, a little at the wrong time, upon other people. But being so earnest, he caught those who otherwise might not have listened ; and this morning, though I came to Dene full of my own fears and Mrs Weir's sorrows, I still was carried away by what he said, so as for a time to be interested by it.

Of course people who have a hobby of any kind try to make you believe that the one thing upon which they have set their hearts is the remedy for all evils. Farmer Kemp was so bent upon this scheme for improving the labourers' cottages, that, to hear him talk, one might have fancied that if poor people had

sufficient space for their families to live decently, there would be no evil left in the world.

But putting aside that which I suppose is the weak point with us all, he certainly did open my eyes to several things which I had never thought of before. He made me see how persons brought up respectably may sink into actual vice from the want of a comfortable home ; how the wife leaves her neat habits and becomes slovenly, because she finds it useless to try and be tidy, when the wet comes in at the roof, and the floor is damp, and the windows are broken, and she cannot get them mended, and the children are sickly from cold and draughts, and huddled together in one room, and perhaps three or four in one bed. And he showed me also how the husband leaves his fireside because he finds no comfort there, and goes to the ale-house, and so takes the first step on the road which is to lead him and his family to ruin of body and soul ;—and how the boys, as they grow up, are driven away from home by the dirt, and quarrelling, and confusion, and lounge about in the lanes with idle companions, and are at length led into great sin ;—and how the daughters grow bold and forward, from being forced to live, as it were, in public, and so lose the sense of all which makes a woman modest and respectable, and become a disgrace and burden to their families. All this, and much more, Farmer Kemp put before me,—and I listened, for I could not help it, though my thoughts wandered off at times to Roger and Mr Richardson, and the conversation on which all my plans in life were to depend. The subjects were not so very far apart as they seemed. If I did not go to Canada with Roger, I might have to live at Sandcombe with William and Leah ; and there were more cases than Kitty Hobson's which I felt sure would trouble me if I was with them. I knew that William had a good many cottages in his own hands, and that the general opinion was that he was a hard man to his labourers. After talking to Farmer Kemp, it seemed more impossible than ever to be happy with him and Leah.

I dined at Longside. Mrs Kemp would not let me go, and I waited, expecting Roger every minute, but he did not come ; and I made up my mind at last that he had gone home over the hill, instead of coming back for me. As it was by that time nearly half-past twelve, and Mrs Kemp pressed me much to stay, it seemed better that I should. Roger, I knew, would eat his cold meat alone without troubling himself about me, and I must con-

ness that it was a great relief to me to be with people of my own class, who could understand and feel for me.

It was a different kind of comfort from that which I often felt in conversing with Mrs Weir. It gave me a feeling of breathing fresh air, but it did not raise me up as talking to Mrs Weir did. Mrs Kemp showed me how to make use of this world, Mrs Weir how to despise it. Both were good in their way; but Mrs Kemp's lesson was the first and easiest, and it strikes me that it is the one first taught us by God.

We had a little conversation about Kitty Hobson after dinner, and I was glad to find that Mrs Kemp meant to give her a trial, though Leah had cast her off.

It had been upon my mind that something should be done for the girl, knowing that Leah had taken no pains with her, and turned her off without proper warning, but I had been too much occupied with my own troubles to form any plan for her. Mrs Richardson, it appeared, considered her not by any means hopeless, and had persuaded Mrs Kemp to take her, and put her under a steady dairymaid, who would see that she did her work, and keep her out of harm's way. I think, having so few poor people near me to care for, had made me more particular about those whom I did at all know. I never could rest till I had done for them all that seemed to lie in my power, though that was little enough. But, as Mrs Kemp said, 'If you can only stop the stone before it begins to roll down, you may keep it safe; when once it has set off, there is no checking it.' Kitty Hobson might be on the brink of everything that was bad; but she was as yet only on the brink. So I was pleased to hear that she was to be at Longside, and I told Mrs Kemp that, if she went on well, I thought I had a stuff gown I could give her as an encouragement.

I felt better and brighter after having settled this little matter,—more able to look trouble in the face. Helping others always gives one a feeling of strength; at least, I have found it so.

I shrank less from the mention of Canada when Farmer Kemp and John Hervey spoke to me about it before I went away. They were very kind and straightforward, as was their fashion, but both of them agreed in advising me to stay at home. I was sure that John was sorry when he said it, he looked at me so sorrowfully; and when, at length, I said good-bye to them all, and set off on my way back to Dene, he walked part of the way

with me, and I was able to open my heart to him, more even than to Mrs Kemp, because there were subjects connected with Dene which he knew more about than any one else.

He was such a bright, hopeful person, that merely talking to him did me good. And he had a kind way of turning his mind to the things that interested one, which led me on in spite of one's self. And then he understood Roger so well, so much better than other people. He knew all that lay hid under that rough, silent manner of his. When I said that Roger's heart would break if he was left to bear trouble by himself, he did not laugh as some might have done, he only said earnestly, though cheerfully, 'It won't do, Ursie, to take more care upon yourself than God intends for you. You may try to keep Roger's heart from breaking; and whilst you are doing that, you may all the time be breaking some other person's. What is to hinder you from running away from him some day, and setting up a home of your own?'

'I have a home,' I answered, eagerly. 'Roger's home is my home, and it will be mine always.' I believe I said it all the more eagerly, because something of misgiving lay at the bottom of my heart.

John Hervey laughed, as he answered, 'You may change your note some day, Ursie; and, anyhow, it is not wise to look to that only, for you know there are two wills to the bargain you and Roger seem to have made; and if, after all, he keeps to it, he has but to send for you, and you can go to him.'

John had a dreadful quantity of common sense. I don't think when he was a boy he could ever have cared for the kind of reading which had always been such happiness to me. He never indulged in notions of what he would do if he was in other circumstances. I am sure he would have thought me wild if I had told him one quarter of the fancies and wishes which had haunted me as long as I could remember. It was just the present duty with him, and nothing beyond but trust. I think that gave him his singular look of happiness; he was never perplexed what to do, because he did what came, and left the consequences. Sometimes, when I have looked upon the light, rippling and dancing on the waves below St Anne's Hill, I have thought that it was just like John's sunny mind, making a clear, bright path wherever it moved.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN I reached home, I found Mrs Weir awake, and inquiring for me. Seeing Mr Richardson had been a great comfort to her; but she was still in a maze, not able to keep any one plan or idea in her head for ten minutes together, except it might be the duty of joining her husband. Mr Richardson had promised to write and make inquiry about him for her, and this was the point to which she turned continually. As to taking any steps for removing from Dene at present, it seemed to her an utter impossibility. Servants, and carriages, and horses, must all be kept; no one could tell why, except that it must be found out first where Mr Weir was.

I am afraid, poor lady! she tried me a little. I was young, with a clear head, and strong nerves, and a good constitution, and I found it very difficult to enter into such an anxious, undecided mind, burdened and shattered as it was by long sorrow; and I was selfish, too, for I was very unhappy, and never could endure suspense, and I felt, though I did not choose to own it to myself, that my plans might possibly be determined by those of Mrs Weir. It was so strange to me to see her sitting in her drawing-room, with all her little comforts and pretty things about her, and working just as usual, not seeming to know how many important things were to be discussed and arranged. I could almost have thought she did not fully know what had happened, only that her eyes were so weak and red; and every now and then she would lay down her work and fold her hands together, and I saw her lips move, and knew that the grief was so keen that it could only be soothed by prayer.

Active and sharp-sighted as people called me, I had a great deal to learn from Mrs Weir.

I spent but a few minutes with her, for it had been an idle day with me, and I had a great deal to do at the cottage; yet, as I left the house, a sudden impulse seized me to run up, just for two minutes, to the seat upon the bank, and breathe the fresh air from the down. I went by the back of the house instead of by the garden, for I wished to avoid being seen; but I was not able to escape Miss Milicent's watchful eye, and I had scarcely reached the little gate opening from the road into the shrubbery before she joined me.

‘What are you doing here, Ursie Grant? I thought I should find you at home. You have not been at home all day.’

‘No, Miss Milicent,’ I said; ‘I had business away.’ I am afraid I had always some pleasure in baffling her.

‘I have been wanting you; I have a great many things to say to you. Are you going in now?’

I replied that I should be in a few minutes, and, turning aside from the shrubbery, I walked some paces on, as though I wished to go out upon the down.

‘If you are going to walk, I will come with you,’ pursued Miss Milicent.

‘I would not give you that trouble,’ I replied; for I saw there was no chance of being rid of her. ‘If you please, I will go back with you to the house.’

‘But you had business up here,’ she said, scanning my face carefully. ‘You were looking for some one, or waiting for some one.’

‘I was going to sit by myself and think a little,’ I said, quietly. Such a strange, doubting look she gave me! And then she said, as though she was determined to test me, ‘If it is your brother you are watching for, Ursie Grant, you will most likely find him at home. He came back from Compton, under the down, by the gamekeeper’s cottage.’

‘I was not watching for any one, Miss Milicent,’ was my answer; ‘it was as I said, I was going to sit by myself.’

I am afraid that was rather a rude speech; but she aggravated me uncommonly, and I had not enough religion at that time to enable me to keep my passionate temper under proper control.

‘It won’t hurt you to go back and talk over some matters with me,’ said Miss Milicent, decidedly; ‘and if Roger Grant is in, he can come and talk too.’

‘Roger is very busy, Miss Milicent,’ I replied; ‘if there is anything particular to be said, you had best, please, tell it to me, and I will repeat it to him.’

She stood still for a moment, putting her hand in the pocket of her black jacket. A change came over her face—I noticed it though she turned aside—a flush was upon her cheek, and a mist seemed to rest upon her eyes. They were not fierce eyes then; there was a world of feeling in them, struggling, as it seemed, to have vent. But she kept an iron rule over herself, as she did over others, and, whatever there might have been work-

ing within, she prevented it from coming forth in her voice, as she laid her strong hand on my shoulder, and said, 'You will be leaving Dene soon, Ursie Grant; we shall not have need of you nor of Roger.'

My spirit was up then, I confess, and I said, 'We are ready to go, Miss Milicent; Roger has other work looked out for him, and I came here only for him.'

Others might well have been angry at my manner, but I doubt if Miss Milicent even remarked it. She went on, in her own way, 'You will be finding other friends, and you are a stirring woman, Ursie, so you won't have much time to think about Dene.'

'I shall think about it, Miss Milicent,' I answered. 'I have been very happy here, and Mrs Weir has been very kind.'

'And I have been very cross,' she said, bluntly; and then she stopped. 'But it is no use to talk of that. If I was cross without cause, I am very sorry now; and if I had cause, I will try to be sorry when I can think it over.'

I believe I smiled; it was such a very odd way of being penitent. She went on, 'I didn't come to you to talk about that so much, but I would just ask the question at once—are you thinking of going with Roger wherever he goes?'

'I can't say,' was my reply; 'it is all uncertain.'

'But you must make up your mind before long; and what will you do till it is settled?'

'I have not thought about it, Miss Milicent. I can't settle things in such a hurry.'

'Then it is a pity you didn't live before the Deluge,' she replied. 'Life isn't long enough for people who think so much before they know which foot to put foremost. I have settled all my matters, and my mother's too, since breakfast.'

'They may be easier than mine,' I said, 'and you have no one but yourself and Mrs Weir to consult.'

What a foolish speech it was! It must have seemed as though I alluded to Mr Weir's absence; but I don't know how it is, I often find that if there is anything I ought not to say, I am sure to say it.

Miss Milicent stamped her foot upon the ground and bit her lip, but the next moment she was looking me full in the face; and, speaking almost angrily, she said, 'If you haven't any other place to stay at, Ursie Grant, there is a home for you at Dene whilst we are here, which won't be many weeks; and when we

go to Compton, which Mr Richardson and I think is best, you can come too, and I think you may be some good to my mother, if you will.' The last words escaped as though against her inclination.

'Thank you, Miss Milicent,' I replied. But I couldn't say more, for I scarcely understood what she meant.

She twisted a large gold ring, which she wore on her middle finger, round and round, as she always did when she was put out. Neither of us said more for some seconds.

"Thank you," means you won't stay,' said Miss Milicent at last.

'It means I must do whatever duty comes before me,' I replied.

'Well! but if it is a duty to help my mother? It may be.'

'I would help Mrs Weir willingly, if I could,' I replied; 'but she is not my first claim.'

'She is no claim at all,' exclaimed Miss Milicent; and her face became crimson, and then all colour left it, and it grew, not pale, but a kind of bluish yellow. She sat down upon the bench.

'You aren't well, Miss Milicent,' I said, drawing near.

She motioned me from her, turned away her head, and almost to my terror I heard, as she buried her face in her hands, something like a groan.

My thought was to go away. She was one who would never forget having been seen to be weak and foolish. But I need not have been afraid. She rose up again quite calm, and said, more gently, 'It is not my mother's wish, nor mine, Ursie, to interfere with any claims; but there is much to be done, and a good head wanted, and my mother has been used to trust to you; and it seemed that, just for a while, till you had another house over your head, you might have been willing to stay on, and see how things are going; and so I said it;—but if you have other claims, don't think of it. We shall do; we shall get on quite well. Don't think of it;' and she waved her hand, as I was about to speak, and moved towards the shrubbery gate.

How proud she was!—but how proud I was, too! My conscience gave me such a pang, I couldn't bear it. I caught hold of her dress, and said, 'Stay, Miss Milicent; don't let us part this way. I have claims, but not just now. I could stay, if it were any good; for Mrs Weir'—and the thought of her sorrow came over me, and my voice trembled.

'You would be cared for,' she said, not letting herself be moved.

'Yes; Mrs Weir cares for every one,' I said.

'And you would have board, and lodging, and'—

'It is all I want,' I exclaimed, hastily.

'And Fanny is to stay, to cook, and do the work; and you would have Mrs Mason's rooms for the time,' continued Miss Milicent.

'Yes, yes, indeed; I know it would be all very comfortable.'

'And you could go on with your work. Nobody would ask anything of you—only if now and then you had a fancy to look in upon my mother;—but we wouldn't interfere. We would have you think of your own claims. And if we move to Compton, there would be only a very small room; it mightn't be comfortable. We had rather you should go just your own way.'

But as Miss Milicent spoke, I saw by her restless eye that her whole heart was set upon the plan.

I felt it best to cut the matter short. I don't think I was gracious; though I wished to be. 'It's best to take one step at a time in such matters, Miss Milicent,' I said. 'We won't settle anything about Compton now. There is no knowing what may happen. Roger may be off to a new home, and wish me to go with him; so it would not do to make an engagement. But as for staying, I will do my utmost for the time being to help set matters right here, and work for Mrs Weir in any way she wishes it; and food and lodging will be quite an equivalent.'

Her face changed. 'That is as you think, not as I think,' she said; and she held out her hand to me.

I took hold of it. Her large, strong fingers held mine quite in a gripe. We gave each other a hearty shake. 'You will do my mother good, Ursie Grant,' she said.

'Then I shall do myself good, and make myself happy,' I said, earnestly; 'for there is no one I would serve sooner than Mrs Weir.' And so we parted.

I had settled upon the next step. I did not repent it, even when I thought the matter over quietly by myself. After all, there was a good deal of self-pleasing in that notion of mine, that I could never be away from Roger. Whatever the end of it all might be, he would manage very well without me for a time. William would give him a home at Sandcombe, and Leah was less likely to complain if she had only one of us quartered upon her. And I had decided, without any arguing backwards and

forwards, and consulting my own wishes. I had determined to do just the thing put before me as a duty, and not think of consequences ; and I was beginning to learn—what I have since been taught thoroughly by long experience—that when a person is in a puzzle, being come to a point in life where many roads meet, and there is no sign-post, there is no greater mistake than to try and direct yourself by your reason. It won't help you at all ; for ten to one but it is biassed by inclination. Neither are friends very likely to help ; for they can, for the most, only decide according to what you tell them. The first little sign of duty that comes, if it is only in the way of setting your house to rights or casting up your accounts, is the sign-post set up by God's Providence ; and when that is done, He will be sure to open the way wider, if you have only patience to wait. But we are all apt to overlook the little duty, and think we will attend to it when we have settled the great one ; and so we set out on the wrong road, perhaps never to regain the right one. I might have argued with myself for hours whether it was best to stay at Dene, or go wherever Roger went, and not have come to a conclusion ; or, if I had, I should not have been satisfied that I had decided rightly. But Miss Milicent's offer, and the knowledge that I might help Mrs Weir, seemed to me to be God's sign-post, and I was thankful that I had made up my mind to follow it.

I bustled about all the afternoon, trying to prevent myself from over-thinking ; but there was no heart in what I did, for was not everything to be upset and undone before long ? About five o'clock I laid out the tea-things, expecting Roger to come in, and I took a pleasure, though it made my heart ache all the while, in putting some stocks, and sweet-briar, and a rose or two in a flower-jar which Jessie Lee had given me about a fortnight before. I thought whether such flowers grew in Canada, and it seemed as though I could scarcely live without something bright and sunshiny ; but I turned away from the subject, and ran across to the house for a minute, to ask for Mrs Weir, and see if there was anything I could do for her. Mrs Mason was making her a cup of coffee ; so I took it up, and we had a few minutes' conversation—not about anything particular, but there was something in her way of speaking which made me feel how glad she was to have me about her, and I went back comforted.

Roger was coming down the hill on horseback as I left the house ; the horse was quite hot, so I knew he had been riding

fast, not to be late for tea. He called out to me directly, to say he was sorry he had kept me waiting ; and then he jumped off, and led his horse away to the stable. I did not go after him, for I was ashamed of my impatience ; and besides, Roger never liked to me made to tell things before his own time,—very few men do. Presently he came in, looking very warm, and pushing his hair off his forehead. He sat down just for a moment, and then he jumped up, and said he should go in the back kitchen and wash his hands ; he was not fit to sit down to tea. I let him go, but it seemed a terrible long time before he came back. He drew a chair to the table, and began cutting some bread. I gave him his cup of tea, but it didn't please him, and he took up the milk-jug, and poured out an ocean of milk, only slowly, almost drop by drop, looking at it intently all the while.

I could bear it no longer. 'Well!' I said.

'Well! Trot.'

He smiled so pleasantly, I could almost have believed it was a dream that trouble was at hand.

'Come out to Canada to see me this time next year, Trot?'

'Then it's settled,' I said.

'Yes, settled.'

I must have cut my piece of bread into twenty bits before I tried to speak again. Roger laid down his knife, and stretched his hand across the table.

'Shake hands, little woman ; we will have merry days yet, please God.'

'Merry days for you, perhaps,' I exclaimed, bitterly. 'You are a man, and you like change.'

'I like doing what comes to me as right,' he said, gravely ; 'and so do you, Trot, when you let yourself think. I have talked it all over with Mr Richardson. He has known other men go out, and do well ; and he thinks I have a better chance than most. I have a fair sum to begin with, and it will go farther there than here.'

'And so you are all for making money,' I said. 'That was never your line before, Roger.'

He was very patient with me. He saw that sorrow made me perverse.

'Well! yes,' he said, and he laughed. 'I am all for making money,—not for money's sake, but for money's worth,—that I might be of use in the world, and do a few things I have a fancy for. When your wedding-day comes, Ursie, you shall have no

cause to complain, because your brother Roger set out in life with a wish to make money.'

That was too much for me. I jumped up and kissed him, and then I rushed away to the window.

When I came back, we were able to discuss matters quietly. He told me that Mr Richardson had entered into the business very kindly, and had given him a good deal of information, having some relations in Canada. He had lent him a book, too, which would help him in some ways; but the thing he most advised was that Roger should go up to London, to consult with a person whom Mr Richardson knew, who had been himself in Canada, and had made money there. What was even more to the point, Mr Richardson had advised Roger not to be too shy of asking William for any money he might want. It might cause him a little trouble to raise it, but it was Roger's right, and if he gave up a good prospect of doing well merely from over-scrupulousness, the time would come when both he and William would repent it. This advice had helped Roger a good deal, I could see.

'A second conscience is a great help, Ursie,' he observed to me, as he finished what he had to say of his visit. 'I had a fear of being hard, and selfish, and pressing my own wishes against William's. But I suppose Mr Richardson may be right. To be just to one's self may be the first step towards being just to others. Only it is difficult to know where justice ends and selfishness begins.'

'It can't be with you, Roger,' I said; 'you have not a grain of selfishness in you.'

'Not so sure of that, Ursie,' he said. 'Mr Richardson gave me a hint this afternoon. He told me I was too fond of seeing every one happy about me; and so could not make up my mind to give pain, even when it was needful; and, after all, that is only another kind of selfishness.'

'That was when you were talking of me,' I said.

'Partly of you, partly of William and Leah. They will be sadly put out!'

'And what shall I be?'

He came round to me and patted me on the shoulder. 'A stout-hearted woman, who will bear whatever comes, and be patient.'

'Then Mr Richardson says I am not to go?'

'Not for a year; you will come then, if all goes well, and I

determine to settle there. But Mr Richardson advises me not to be hasty. He thinks his friend in London might put me in the way of finding some one who would let me join with him in managing and working for a year, and so give me time to look about me. He says, what is very true, that to leave one's country and one's relations in a hurry, may be a thing to be repented of all one's life. If I do stay, I must send for you : and there are plenty of people coming out continually, who will take care of you on the voyage ; and I can easily run down and meet you wherever you land.'

I was silent.

'What are you thinking of?' asked Roger.

'Why, that you are a man, Roger, and are turning round to a new life, and liking it ; and not knowing in the least what I shall feel the long year when you are gone—all by myself—no home.'

'Sandcombe,' he said—but his voice was low, almost as though he was ashamed of saying it.

'And would you like Sandcombe yourself?' I said, reproachfully.

He thought for a moment—I saw he was annoyed. But the cloud passed over ; and he answered with such a kind, honest look—I never saw the same in any one else—'No, I should not like it, Trot ; and it is much harder for you to stay than for me to go. But there will be an end.'

'God grant it !' I said ; but it mayn't be the end we are looking for.'

'It will be God's end, anyhow,' he replied.

He walked across the room to a table which stood in the corner, by the dresser—my mother's Bible always lay upon it ; the old Bible out of which he showed me the pictures on a Sunday afternoon, when I was a little girl. He turned to the parting of David and Jonathan ; it was a favourite chapter of his. 'Look here, Ursie,' he said, as he brought the book to me and pointed to the last verses ; 'other people before us have had to part. Just read me the verses ; I like them best in your voice.' And I read : 'And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place towards the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times ; and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. And Jonathan said to David : Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying : The Lord be between me

and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed ; and Jonathan went into the city.'

I could not talk any more of business after that ; but I went up to my own room and prayed, and had a good cry.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE next two months were a perfect whirl. As fast as anything was settled, it seemed to be unsettled ; and every one's plans seemed to interfere with those of another. Day after day Roger arranged to go to London, and see the Canadian gentleman, Mr Green, who was Mr Richardson's friend ; but as surely as he had decided to go, so surely something happened to prevent him. And all this time he was working at William to get the money matter settled ; and William was hanging back and raising difficulties. At last, when it seemed the matter would never come to an end, Farmer Kemp offered to let William have the money, if he would give him the same interest and the same security which had satisfied Roger ; and then there really was no longer any reasonable excuse. I am sure Farmer Kemp did it out of mere love to Roger ; for he and William were not even as much friends as they used to be. The fret about the cottages was always going on ; and Leah made matters worse, for she was angry because Mrs Richardson and Mrs Kemp had taken up Kitty Hobson. I did not trouble myself much about Kitty, nor about any one just then, except Roger and Mrs Weir. When I was not thinking of one, I was of the other. Roger approved of my plan of staying at Dene as long as I could, but how long that would be was a very doubtful matter. There was a report that Mr Weir was in France ; and then Mrs Weir was wild to go to him ; but the next day it was contradicted. A week afterwards, some one declared he had been heard of in America, and the week after that it was France again ; always something new, and always something uncertain ;—and at last, Mr Richardson and Miss Milicent consulted together, and agreed that the only thing to keep Mrs Weir quiet was to put out of her head entirely the notion of going to her husband. Till that was done, there would be no coming to a conclusion about anything else.

Dene, as I think I have said, was Mrs Weir's own property,

settled upon her so that the creditors could not touch it ; but it was not a place she could live at, and there was nothing to be done but to sell it. A good thing it was, so every one said, that there was some one at hand ready to buy it. Captain Price came forward from the first, with a good offer for the house and grounds, not the whole estate, he was by no means rich enough to buy that, for his fortune had been very much overrated. The lawyers talked of trying to obtain more by an auction in London, but Mrs Weir's trustees would not consent. It would bring additional expenses, and after all they could not expect more than the fair sum which Captain Price was willing to give. The interest of this, and a little money belonging to Miss Milicent, which had been left her by her grandmother, would, it was hoped, enable them to live with tolerable comfort.

Mrs Weir was as passive as a child all the time the discussions were going on. I think it provoked Miss Milicent. She once said to me that she thought it quite wicked to take everything for granted in that way. How did her mother know she had a penny? she never took the trouble to ask. It was very true that God fed the sparrows, but if the sparrows didn't open their mouths, no food would ever get down their throats.

There was some truth in this, and I thought I would try and rouse Mrs Weir a little, when I had the opportunity. And that came soon enough ; Farmer Kemp's offer was accepted, and Roger was to go up to London early the next week to see Mr Green ; and then Miss Milicent proposed that I should go over to the house and stay there. One reason was because I might not like sleeping at the cottage alone, and another because Mrs Mason was going away,—a source of greater regret to me I think than to Miss Milicent. I liked Mrs Mason very much, and never forgot the first evening of my coming to Dene, and how kind she was, and the tea Roger and I had with her. We had been good friends from that day, and I owed a great deal to her, and I hope I was grateful, though I was not what might be called fond of her. She was strict, and had not much warmth at the bottom, though a great deal of kindness at the top. I did all I could for her by helping to pack her boxes, and trying to understand about the accounts and other things which she had left not quite settled, and on Saturday morning I said good-bye to her, and she went off in Farmer Kemp's light cart, which was to take her to Hove ; from thence I think she was going to London, to be housekeeper in some great family. It

was the first departure, and it made the place seem very lonely.

I don't like now to recall the last Sunday with Roger at Dene. Some troubles there are in life which it is rather pleasant to look back upon, one feels so glad to have escaped from them. But there are others which arouse a feeling of pity for one's self, such as one might have for another. I remember having read a story of a lady who cried over her own funeral, and really I could almost cry over my mournfulness on that Sunday. There was the last walk to Compton church over the down, and the meeting with William and Leah, and the busy gossip of the neighbours, who came up and talked to us after the service, as if it was the commonest thing in the world that was going to happen to us. And then William would make us go back with him to Sandcombe and dine, and kept us so long there, that we were late at church in the afternoon, and I felt that Roger was fretted with himself for giving in. But we had a quiet time afterwards, and a comforting talk as we walked back to Dene, when it was growing cooler, and there was a breeze on the hill just enough to give motion to the light fern-leaves and the crimson foxglove-bells, and to lift up the hot mist which had been hanging all day over the sea, and show the sparkle of the waves in the bay, and beneath the white cliffs.

They are there still,—the ferns and the foxgloves on the green hill, the white cliffs, the broad blue sea,—but they have never looked to me since as they did on that evening.

The peacock screamed as we entered the Dene shrubbery. I should not have remembered it, but that it made me silly, for I burst into tears, and Roger, seeing Miss Milicent in the road, told me to leave him, and turn into the walks in the plantation, under the hill, till I could get right again. I did not go far away, but remained watching him through the trees, and when Miss Milicent was gone, I ran home as quickly as I could.

There was little to be done in the way of preparation for Roger's journey, so we had a nice, long evening together, talking a good deal more of things past than of things to come. We neither of us liked to dwell much upon them; and we were to meet again, we hoped, before long, and then our way would be made clearer. Now we were like children groping about in the dark.

'Yet not quite the dark,' was Roger's last speech to me as we

took our candles to go to bed. 'God always gives us light enough for the next step.'

The next day Roger was gone, at least from Dene, and I was going; but whither was the question? I felt it ought to be settled soon, and that very afternoon I set myself to the task of bringing Mrs Weir to look her affairs full in the face, and see what she was doing, and what others were doing for her, and what she would wish to have done herself. Miss Milicent, I think, had made a mistake in one respect. She had managed everything for her mother so long, that Mrs Weir was completely out of the habit of managing for herself, and now Miss Milicent was inclined to turn round and reproach her for it.

Poor lady! she looked quite surprised, when I said to her as I carried her cup of coffee into the drawing-room, about five o'clock, 'You must have enough to do, ma'am, to settle your mind when there is so much to be done. I wish I could help you.'

'I leave it all,' she replied. 'It will come right—as right as it can. Do not stand, Ursula. Thank you; please put down the coffee, and there is a seat; the evenings are very long.'

'But growing shorter, ma'am,' I said: 'a fortnight yesterday past the longest day; and then there will only be six weeks more of what one may call summer.'

'I do not look forward, Ursula.'

'Only when you are obliged, I suppose, ma'am. Miss Milicent tells me you think of removing to the new house that is just built at Compton.'

'If it were God's will, I would not wish to move anywhere, Ursula, except to my grave. I am only burdensome; I can do no good.'

'Not perhaps in the way you would like, ma'am,' I replied. 'But if we have life given us, I take it for granted there is some purpose in it, if it is only to exercise others in patience.'

I really did not mean anything particular. I intended only to answer her own words, though, when I had spoken, I saw I might seem rude.

But Mrs Weir took my remark so quietly!—in the way which made me often feel that she had only just missed being a saint.

'You are right, Ursula,' she said. 'We must be content to be trials, if we cannot be blessings. But that will never be your lot, I feel. God has bestowed upon you health and energy, and you are willing, I know, to make a good use of them.'

‘I hope so, ma’am, I should like to make them useful to you now, if you would let me. I shall have a fortnight clear, whilst Roger is in London, before I shall be called to do anything for myself; and if you were thinking of moving, I might be able to assist Miss Milicent in packing.’

‘But, Ursula,’ she slowly raised her eyes with a look of fear, ‘you are not going away? Milicent told me she had offered you a home. You could have it as long as you liked; and no one would ask you to do anything you did not like.’

‘It is not that, ma’am,’ I replied. ‘I hope, if I had duties to attend to, I should not think about liking or disliking; but I don’t see my way to remaining for long, and that is why I should be glad to help you to settle yourself elsewhere now, before I leave.’

‘Milicent! where is Milicent?’ Mrs Weir laid her hand upon a little silver bell, which was one of the many ornaments of her table.

‘Perhaps, ma’am,’ I said, ‘we might be able to manage the matter without Miss Milicent. You are the person who must decide.’

‘Yes, I know—but Milicent—I wish she would come.’

‘If you tell Miss Milicent your wish, she will agree to it, I am sure, ma’am,’ I continued. ‘I heard her say to Mr Richardson the other day, that she only desired you to go where you would be most comfortable.’

‘They will not let me go abroad, Ursula; that is the only thing I ask for.’

‘They don’t see where you are to go to, ma’am,’ I replied; ‘and whilst you are thinking about that, there is something else to be done just before your eyes, if you will be good enough to look at it.’

‘I do not object to the house at Compton,’ she answered, ‘I never said I did, only it is far from the church.’

‘Yes, but not so far as this; and Miss Milicent is a good walker, and it does not much matter to you, ma’am.’

‘No, Ursula, you are right there.’

‘And you would be near Mr Richardson, ma’am.’

‘Yes.’ Her eyes brightened. ‘Perhaps he would come and see me oftener than’

‘And it is better than going quite away,’ I continued, whilst I watched the expression of the poor lady’s face, hoping to see some expression of interest; but just then, to my great annoyance, in rushed Miss Milicent.

'Well, mother! Ursie! I am glad you are here. I have been over the hill to Compton, and seen the house. They won't let us have it for less than fifty pounds unfurnished, and seventy-five furnished. I say it is a shame; but there is nothing else to be had; so I have been to Mr Richardson, and he is coming up here to-morrow, and you have only to say yes to him, mother, and then he will see the landlord in Hove on Wednesday, and settle it, and we can move in by next Monday.'

Miss Milicent stuck her hands in her pockets, and leaned against the mantel-piece. Mrs Weir sank back in her chair, extinguished.

'It was just what Mrs Weir and I were talking of, Miss Milicent,' I said. 'Mrs Weir seems to think that Compton will be the best place.'

'Of course; there is nothing else to be done.'

'And you would not prefer any other place, ma'am?' I said.

Miss Milicent looked daggers at me, and beckoned me out of the room.

Instead of attending to her at once, I waited for Mrs Weir's answer.

'I do not know, Ursula; it comes so quickly; but it will all be right.'

Miss Milicent turned round at the door. 'Ursie, there is some packing I want to talk to you about.'

I followed her; she closed the door behind her.

'Are you a fool, Ursie Grant? What do you mean by putting notions into my mother's head? The house at Compton is taken.'

'Is it quite, Miss Milicent?' I said; 'surely it is for Mrs Weir to decide.'

'Decide! it is decided. She has nothing to do but to say yes. She is not fit for more, you see.'

'You will excuse me, I hope, Miss Milicent,' I replied; 'but it seems to me that Mrs Weir will never be fit to say even yes for herself, whilst no one gives her the opportunity of saying no.'

Any one else might have been angry at my boldness; but I will do Miss Milicent the justice to own that she always allowed other people to be as free spoken as she was herself.

'There is nothing for her to say no about,' she replied. 'What she wishes is to go to Compton, and it is what the trustees, and Mr Richardson, and all consider to be best.'

'I only thought that it was respectful to ask Mrs Weir's opinion,' was my reply. 'But I beg your pardon for interfering, Miss Milicent ; it is no business of mine.'

She scarcely heeded the remark ; but, as I was moving away, she caught me by the arm, and said, 'There is a room for you at Compton, Ursie Grant.'

Thank you, Miss Milicent ; but I am afraid it won't quite suit me to use it.'

'But it will be ready for you ; I am going to have a bed put up.'

'You are very good ; but I must see what my duties at Sandcombe are first.'

'You have no duties at Sandcombe, Ursie, none half so great as staying with us and helping my mother. Mr Richardson and I settled it was the best thing you could do.'

My spirit was up then, and I felt my cheek flush.

'I thank you for troubling yourself about me, Miss Milicent,' I said, 'but I think it might be better for me to decide for myself. If you please, I will let you know what I determine by next Thursday.' And making an excuse of business, that I might not be urged any more, I hurried away.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next day I went over to Sandcombe. Little as I fancied taking advice from Leah, I yet felt that it would be right to hear what her ideas were as to giving me a home there, and whether I should be a help or a burden to her. Besides, it was Roger's wish that I should talk matters over with her and William, and though I should have liked to go my own way independently, it did not seem right to keep aloof from relations.

There was plenty of work going on in the farm-yard and the out-houses, but the house itself seemed dull as I went in. I missed Jessie Lee's voice. When she was there she was generally to be heard singing, and the notes were like a bird's, they were so sweet ; but it was all silent now, except the sound of my own footsteps as I walked up the stone passage. I went straight to the little parlour and knocked, thinking I should be sure to find Leah

there. It was William who said 'Come in;' and, when I went in, I found them both together, looking as though something was very much amiss.

Leah broke out directly, scarcely allowing time for William to shake hands; 'Here is a fuss, Ursie; Jessie has been as good as brought up by us, and now mother is going to take her quite away. So that we are not to depend upon her any more. It is too hard, after all the trouble I have had with her; but mother complains of feeling lonely.'

This was not surprising, for Mr Morris had died shortly before, and Mrs Morris had left the farm, and was living in a comfortable little house in Ilatton, whilst her son was trying farming in a distant county.

'I thought we shouldn't be allowed to keep Jessie much longer,' said William; 'especially now Mrs Morris is ill.'

'It is only rheumatism; she will be well enough before long,' said Leah; 'and, of course,' she added, seeing, I suspect, that I looked a little ashamed of her cool way of talking; 'I shouldn't mind giving her up for a time, just till mother is well; but I had put off getting extra help, quite depending upon Jessie; and now there is hay-making scarcely over, and harvest coming on, and ever so much to be done, and I have not a creature to look to.'

My heart sunk; I saw which way things were tending, and I don't think I knew till then how I dreaded the notion of a home at Sandcombe. I made no answer, and Leah went on with her complaints.

'The new girl wants a sharp eye upon her, and I can't be in two places at once, and Jessie looked after the dairy, and took the poultry quite off my hands, and was a very fair cook, thanks to my teaching. It is too hard that she should be taken from me at a moment's notice.'

'Another girl will only be another mouth to feed,' said William, decidedly. 'We have too many about the place already; Farmer Kemp does with one, and I don't see why we shouldn't.'

Leah bit her lip, and observed that she had not married to be made a slave, and have the Kemps thrown in her face always. Mrs Kemp had Mary to help her, and she was worth fifty girls.

'Well, then, here is Ursie,' said William, trying to look very good-natured and disinterested. 'She is coming to make a home here, and I am sure she will be willing enough to work for her board.'

A fair proposal it was ; but Roger would not have said it. I answered, cautiously, ' You must not depend upon me, William ; Mrs Weir wants me to stay with her.'

' Stay with Mrs Weir ; why, she has scarcely butter enough for her own bread, much less for yours,' exclaimed Leah. ' You are not going to be such a goose, Ursie, as to stay with her !'

' I suppose I am not likely to get much more than butter here,' I replied, laughing. ' You are not going to hire me as your servant ; neither you nor Mrs Weir are. In both places I should be required to work for my board : and at Mrs Weir's I might have time to make a little money over and above for myself, by needlework.'

' And what is to hinder you from having time here ?' replied Leah.

' Jessie had none,' I answered. ' If I am to work as hard as Jessie, I shall not be better off.'

I could not help saying this, for I had always felt that it was a shame for them to put so much upon Jessie, and not let her have any help when they could very well afford it.

' She does not want to come,' said William, speaking to Leah, in a vexed tone ; ' that is the long and the short of the matter.'

He was quite right ; but I ought not to have let it out. I was wrong, as I always was when I did not like things or people. No wonder that I was often called ungracious. I tried to correct myself, and answered, ' Please don't say that, William ; the long and the short of the matter, as you call it, is, that it is my duty to do the best I can for myself during Roger's absence. I have a fair supply of needlework now, and could get more, and that is what I have to look to to keep me in clothes, unless I take from the little I have laid by, which is against Roger's wish and my own too. Wherever I go I must either be paid for my services or have certain time to myself, and it would only be deceiving you to pretend to come here and take Jessie's place, when I could not take Jessie's duties.'

' Then what did you think of doing if you came here ?' asked Leah, sharply.

' I had not thought much about it,' I replied. I could not say more, for my voice was quite choked.

I think William perceived what I felt, for he said, in a tone of excuse, ' Of course, Ursie, we should not talk of your working for your board if we could help it, and if we didn't know it would make you more comfortable. But we are sure you would never

bear to be a burden, and this has been a bad year, you see ; the hay is poor, and little enough of it ; and turnips want rain ; and our wheat is not looking half as well as that on the other side of Hove ; and, what with the repairs of the cottages, and the lawyer's expenses which have come from Roger's whim, I am likely to find myself short at Christmas. I thought you and Roger would have understood this, and would have been willing to lend a helping hand.'

'I am willing, quite willing,' I exclaimed, 'I wouldn't be indebted'—I was going to be ungracious again, but something brought the thought of Mrs Weir and her patient gentleness to my mind, and I added quietly, 'If I do come to you, William, I don't think you will ever find me unwilling to lend a helping hand to the utmost. I should be bound to do it, just as I was bound to help Roger. But it would be foolish to promise to take a girl's place, or do the things Jessie did, because I should require to have some time to myself in the afternoons. That is all I meant to say.'

'And that would do very well, Leah, wouldn't it?' said William, and he walked to the door, and waited with the handle in his hand, impatient to be gone.

'If Ursie wasn't so uppish, she would have seen long ago that it was all we wanted,' said Leah. 'I don't understand myself what all the fuss has been about.'

'Nor I neither,' said William, and he came back and kissed me. 'You know, Ursie, if I was a rich man you should have a home here as long as you liked just for the asking.'

'Thank you, William. When Roger and I are in Canada, whether we are rich or poor, you shall have a home without the asking.'

William went off quickly, trying to hum a tune, which, somehow, I don't think came quite easily. Leah turned to me rather sharply. 'What did you mean, Ursie, just now, by saying you were going to stay with Mrs Weir, when she won't have a house over her head? Dene is to be sold, and the whole estate is mortgaged up to its full value and over, and there is to be a subscription raised for Mrs Weir amongst her friends, and Miss Millicent is going out as a governess.'

I burst into a fit of laughter, which made Leah quite angry. 'It is very well for you to laugh,' she said, 'but it's true. I had it from the best authority ; of course they don't tell you everything, why should they? But you will find it so ; and as for

your notion of living with Mrs Weir, you might as well think of living with the man in the moon.'

'I am not sure that I shan't think of living with him soon,' I replied. 'There will be a chance of hearing less gossip and more truth there than here. Jane Shaw, I suppose, told you this nonsense.'

'And she is more likely to know than any one else,' answered Leah, 'seeing she is to be mistress of Dene.'

I waited before answering, for, often lately as I had heard Jane's prospects spoken of, I could not yet make up my mind to take the notion patiently.

'The wedding is to come off the end of September,' continued Leah, anxious to pour out all she knew. 'Captain Price's sisters and an aunt are coming, and a good many gentlemen friends, and Jane is thinking already about her dress, Jessie says. I don't believe, though, for my part, that Dene will be ready for them by that time. There will be a good deal to do with papering, and painting, and furnishing, after the old lady is gone. Jane says she is not going to be particular, and they can wait for the new dining-room furniture till next year, but I don't fancy they will when it comes to the point. By the by, Ursie, you must be upon your best behaviour, and remember to say Miss Shaw now. Jessie tells me Jane quite expects it.'

'I am very willing,' I answered. 'She would never have been Jane Shaw to me, if I had not known her from a child. Is there anything I can do for you in Hatton, Leah? I am going on there to get a few things for the house.'

'Nothing; unless—well, you might, perhaps, carry a parcel over to Jessie. She left a gown here and a pair of shoes.'

One of the farm boys lived at Hatton, and might very well have taken the parcel, but I was unwilling to appear unkind. Besides, it saved Leah a penny; for the child might have expected something for his trouble. I knew she would not forget that.

'And when are you coming, Ursie?' was Leah's gracious invitation at parting.

'I will let you know when I have settled about Mrs Weir,' I replied. 'Good-bye,' and, burdened with my parcel, I departed.

I made my way up the cart-road to the top of the down, and then sat down to rest for a few minutes, and if I could, to think.

I was in a greater perplexity than before, for I felt as though I had been drawn on farther than I intended. My only thought in going over to Sandcombe was to find out whether William and Leah really wished me to stay with them, and were likely to be in any way hearty about it. In that case, and if they had thrown themselves at all into my position, I could have talked over everything openly and easily. But this fashion of bargaining, and making the most of me, threw me back upon myself. It was no use to ask advice of people who were only bent upon seeing things their own way, for their own advantage. I could, indeed, write to Roger, but it might make ill-will between him and William to explain what I felt, and that would never do, especially just as he was going away from England, perhaps never to come back again. If a disagreeable thing is to be done, the fewer people there are concerned in it the better. Moreover, at the bottom of my heart lay a doubt as to what Roger would say. He would very likely tell me that it was a safe home, and that I had better be patient and bear up, and it would soon be over, and I should join him in Canada.

But that would be his man's way of looking at the great end, and not seeing the little steps by which it is to be reached ; and I never shut my eyes as he did to the possibility that the day for me to join him in Canada might never come, and that the step I was going to take now was one which must have an influence upon my future life.

I hated Sandcombe. I really don't think the word is too strong. I did not hate William and Leah, but I hated all their ways of looking at things.

When I was with them I felt, as it were, unable to breathe. I had to think of every word I said, and check even the tone of my voice, lest I should show the feelings which would rise up in spite of myself, and must, I knew, give offence. A room to myself in a cottage would have been Paradise compared to a home at Sandcombe. And there was Mrs Weir in great trouble, and wanting me ; and even Miss Milicent setting her heart upon having me. There seemed no question which would be the best. Let William and Leah, and even Roger, say what they might, I would make up my mind to remain with Mrs Weir.

If only I had not disliked Sandcombe quite so much ! It was the one thing which made me pause.

As I sat upon the hill, meaning every minute to walk on, and yet tempted to rest a little longer, I heard the soft sound of horses' hoofs upon the turf. Two men were cantering across the down, from the direction of Hatton gate. As they came nearer I knew them to be Farmer Kemp and John Hervey.

They passed me at first without knowing me; but, immediately afterwards, I heard John say, 'Why, there is Ursie Grant!' and he turned his horse and rode up to me, and the farmer trotted up after him.

'Here, all alone, lassie!' called out the farmer, as he drew in his horse. 'I should never have expected to see you sitting doing nothing, so early in the day.'

'Only resting,' I replied, and I stood up. 'I have been to Sandcombe, and I am going on to Hatton.'

'And carrying a good-sized load with you,' said John, looking at Jessie's parcel.

'Not a very heavy one,' I answered, and I smiled a little; but I suppose the smile was not a very hearty one, for the farmer changed his tone directly, as he said, 'You are not doing well for yourself, Ursie; you had much better come down to Longside, and have a talk with my good woman; it will do you more good than thinking.'

'I have some things to buy at the grocer's, at Hatton,' I said, 'and here is Jessie Lee's parcel to be taken to her; I don't think I can come to Longside to-day.'

'It wouldn't take me ten minutes to ride back with the parcel,' said John, very good-naturedly; 'but I don't know so well about the grocer. What is to be done there, Ursie? My housekeeping has been on a small scale hitherto, so I am not up to the needs of a family.'

'Then it is time you should learn,' said the farmer, sharply, but laughing as he spoke. 'Don't you think so, Ursie? It is not every man who has a wife he can trust to manage her own housekeeping.'

'He is a foolish man who marries a wife he can't trust,' I replied.

John laughed merrily, and said I had made a good answer, and he quite agreed with me; and if ever he married a woman who couldn't go to the grocer's, he should think he deserved the fate of a fool.

'The fate of George Price, Esq., when he marries Miss Jane Shaw,' said the farmer, twirling his whip in the air. 'If ever

there was a man bent upon riding to ruin, full gallop, it s that young jackanapes. There must be something in the air of Dene that's catching. But come, Ursie, hand up your parcel to John, and turn back with me. I can walk my horse, and you shall tell me about Roger.'

It was a great temptation; a kind word and a friendly thought were so specially dear to me just then; but I was in a difficulty as to managing my purchases at the grocer's.

John Hervey noticed my hesitation. 'Shopping and all,' he said, 'I can manage it, Ursie.'

'I have known you long enough to be sure of that,' I replied.

'Don't trust him too far, though,' said the farmer. 'He is well enough when there's no fun in the way, but let him get a scent of the hounds—they are out to-day—and your parcel would go to the winds, and the grocer's business after it. I vow that mare understands; she pricks up her ears at the very name.'

'I would trust Mr Hervey, hounds or no hounds,' I said; 'if he undertook it he would do it.'

John's face, which was like a sunbeam generally, clouded over for a moment. I thought I had been too bold, and spoken as if I was his equal; which I was not, for he was a man when I was a child, and I had always been taught to look up to him.

'I should not like to give you the trouble, though, Mr Hervey,' I said. 'Mary Kemp and I might be able to walk over to Hatton, late.'

The mare was becoming restive, and John jumped off and caught up the parcel from the ground. 'Now, Ursie, the list; I shall overtake you before you are at Longside.'

I had the paper inside my glove, and I took it out and gave it to him. He returned me such a squeeze of the hand. I cried out, and we both laughed; and he was mounted again, with the parcel before him, and galloping towards Hatton Gate, before I had time to put my glove on.

'A capital good fellow!' said the farmer, 'and a merry one, too! Now, lassie, step out, and my Dobbin shall step in, and so we'll keep together.'

CHAPTER XX.

FARMER KEMP and I had but little conversation upon anything specially important to me, on our way to Longside. I told him what I knew about Roger's plans, but it was little use to consult him about Mrs Weir and Leah. It was not in his way to give advice upon such matters, and the very reason he was taking me back with him to Longside was, that I might talk things over with his wife and Mary. But in his honest, kind-hearted way, he showed me true sympathy; even when he talked about his own concerns, such as draining, and horse-hoeing, and drilling, he had always a word to say about Roger and his prospects, and it cheered me to hear him speak of the probability of his doing well as almost a certainty. Not that Farmer Kemp knew much about Canada, or how people farmed there; but I was in such a maze and doubt about everything, that I clung even to straws for comfort.

The farmer took me into the parlour at Longside, and sent Mary to fetch a piece of cake and a glass of wine, ordering, at the same time, a cup of ale for himself, with which he drank to my good health and good fortune, and a husband by that time twelvemonth; and then he kissed me on both cheeks, saying, 'he didn't know why he wasn't to have an old man's privilege,' and went away tramping down the passage, calling for his wife, and singing the chorus of a harvest song.

Mrs Kemp came in soon afterwards. Mary offered to go away, and I said nothing to prevent her, for I felt I might have things to mention about others which might seem unkind, and there was no need to have them poured into more ears than was necessary.

'Well, Ursie! so the farmer says you are come to have a talk,' said Mrs Kemp; and she went to the cupboard, and fetched her work-box; and, sitting down in the leathern arm-chair, began to mend a pair of her husband's worsted stockings. 'Can I help you, child? I am willing, as you know.'

Something of a daughter's feeling towards a mother came over me, as I drew my seat towards her chair, and rested my hand upon the arm, and said, 'Dear Mrs Kemp, if I knew what was right to be done, I shouldn't care for anything.'

'Except doing it, I suppose, you mean,' she said.

'It would be easy enough to do, either way,' I replied. 'Roger

says it is not to be for long ; and the farmer tells me it will all come right with him and me in the end. But it is the present time that is the difficulty,—whether to stay with Mrs Weir, or go to Sandcombe ;’ and I told her all that had passed, and the offers I had had about both places. She listened very kindly ; but when I stopped she made no answer.

‘Well !’ I said, a little impatiently.

‘You have it in your heart, Ursie, to stay with Mrs Weir.’

‘How do you know that ?’ I asked.

‘From your way of putting things ; and I don’t say but that it is natural. Leah Grant’s is not such a very tempting home, setting aside that it is your brother’s.’

‘That makes it worse,’ I said ; ‘if it was not my brother’s, I could put up with it ; but the aggravation of one’s own relations is past bearing.’

‘Well ! it is hard, certainly ; but it is God’s will to give us relations.’

‘And it is His will that they should act as such, I suppose,’ was my reply.

‘Surely ; and I don’t see quite how William Grant and his wife have failed. They will give you a home and be kind to you.’

‘O Mrs Kemp ! please—I don’t think you understand at all,’ I exclaimed. ‘If you had only been there and heard them’——

‘I should have said they took things coolly,’ said Mrs Kemp ; ‘but I should not have thought they were wanting in duty.’

‘I don’t care for duty ; it is love I need.’

‘Oh !’ said Mrs Kemp, thoughtfully.

‘Don’t you know what I want ?’ I continued. ‘If I am to be left alone all this year, I must be with people who are fond of me.’

‘Oh !’ again repeated Mrs Kemp.

I was vexed with her ; and I daresay showed it by my face, for I would not speak.

‘Now, don’t be fretted, Ursie, dear,’ continued Mrs Kemp, kindly. ‘You see I am not so quick at taking things in as some people are ; and I must make out what you are aiming at before I can lend you a helping hand. If you want to know where you will be most cared for, that is one thing ; but if you want to find out where it is right you should be, that is another.’

‘Then you are like Roger, and all the rest,’ I exclaimed ; ‘you would have me go and be a slave at Sandcombe, dancing

attendance upon Leah's whims, and not getting "Thank you" for my pains; and you would have me leave poor Mrs Weir in her trouble, and Miss Milicent not knowing in the least how to manage for her. Poor lady! she may die, for aught I know, if she is left to Miss Milicent's care.'

'Well! but Ursie, child,' exclaimed Mrs Kemp, looking up in surprise, 'she has had no one but Miss Milicent to look after her these many years.'

'Oh! but it was different then; she was in less trouble, and she had not been accustomed to depend upon me so much; and her husband was at home; and—it was quite different then—it was indeed.'

'She was in less trouble,' said Mrs Kemp; 'that is true; she must want more comfort just now. But, Ursie—then you have a notion of living with her always.'

'I! dear Mrs Kemp, how could such a thought enter your head?'

'Only, my dear, you said she was becoming accustomed to depend upon you; and I fancied what it would be next year, when you would probably have to leave her.'

'I must let next year take care of itself,' I replied; 'she must learn then to do without me.'

'Well! yes, that may be the best way. But, perhaps, in that case, she might learn to do without you now.' Seeing that I made no reply, Mrs Kemp went on, taking my hand kindly, and fixing her sweet, brown eyes on my face, as though begging me to bear with her if she said things I disliked to hear. 'My dear, I don't want to cross you. There is not much need to tell you that; but you have no mother, and I would fain be one to you. You see, it strikes me that you have rather a twisty way of looking at this matter, to suit your own wishes, which are natural enough and right enough in their way. If you settle to stay with Mrs Weir, because she can't do without you this year, you will have just the same reason for staying with her next year; and a much stronger one, because you will have made yourself more needful to her. But you would be unwilling, I suppose, to remain then.'

'It would be out of the question,' I exclaimed; 'I must go to Roger.'

'And, anyhow—if Roger were to marry, and yet offer you a home—you would go to him?'

'Yes, I must. I could never live away from Roger.'

'But there would be just the same claim, as far as Mrs Weir is concerned,' said Mrs Kemp.

'She is not my relation,' I observed.

'No; that is just what I was thinking. She is not a relation; she is a claim and a duty when you like it, but not when you don't like it.'

I felt the colour mount to my cheeks.

'Then you would never have one put friends before relations, I exclaimed, 'let the friends be never so kind, and the relations never so cross?'

'I would try to take life as God has made it,' was the answer.

'And go to Sandcombe?' I continued.

'Perhaps not just yet. I think it is all very true that Mrs Weir wants a little comfort now; and I would stay and give it her if I could, for a certain time; may be a month or six weeks, or any time you choose, till she is settled in her new home. But, Ursie, if you will take my advice, you will be careful not to put yourself too forward in some things. You are not Mrs Weir's daughter.'

'No,' I exclaimed, and I laughed. 'Fancy if she or Miss Milicent were to hear you say that; as if it could be possible. Why the Weirs are as proud as princes.'

'Pride goes to the wall when folks are in need of comfort,' said Mrs Kemp. 'But, putting aside that, it is a thing I have learned from a good many years' thought and trouble, that to take other persons' duties from them is a course which never has God's blessing upon it. People say—I don't ask you, for it is wrong to pry—but people do say that Miss Milicent is not as careful of her mother as she might be, and as she ought to be. There can't be a worse sin in a quiet way than that, Ursie; and if you help her to continue in it, why you will share the guilt.'

This was quite a new way of looking at the case, and it touched my conscience; for I knew that lately Miss Milicent had left off doing many things for her mother which at one time she had been accustomed to attend to.

'And so you think I should do harm by staying,' I exclaimed.

'It is just this,' continued Mrs Kemp; 'I think the question for us to consider is scarcely ever whether we shall do harm or good anywhere,—for I don't believe we can judge about it; but only to find out where God sends us, and then go.'

'Of course! of course!' I exclaimed. 'Who ever wants anything else?'

'I should have said,' replied Mrs Kemp, 'that most of us think first where we wish to go, and then look to see if God hasn't sent us, and that makes all the difference. Mr Richardson preached a sermon about Balaam last Sunday, and Farmer and I, when we came home, both said we thought we had been Balaams many times in our lives.'

'And I am like Balaam now, then,' I said, half-amused, yet half angry.

Mrs Kemp laughed a little too, as she answered, 'Well! there is the relation—a very near one—a brother, willing to have you, and wishing it; and there is his wife left without help and society, and likely to find you useful, and there is Roger looking upon Sandcombe as your natural home, and leaving you under William's care. It was not you who ordered these things.'

'Nor I who ordered Mrs Weir's troubles,' I replied.

'No; but God made you William Grant's sister, and Miss Milicent Mrs Weir's daughter. That is as much as to say one is to help one, and the other the other.'

'And I am to take Jessie's place, then,' I said. 'I shall not do much for myself in that case.'

'O Ursie! you were always a *contrary* child,' exclaimed Mrs Kemp, in a vexed tone. 'Don't you see that a difficulty about that would alter the whole case. William and Leah must understand. If they won't give you time to work for yourself, and Mrs Weir will, why that settles the question at once; not because of your liking or disliking, or thinking you will be better or do more good in one place than in another; but only because God has so ordered it, that it is needful for you to do something for yourself, that you mayn't be using up the little that is put by for a rainy day, and so at last come to be a burden on your friends.'

I knew that quite as well as Mrs Kemp; it was just what I had said to Leah, but somehow it did not come home to me pleasantly.

I would so much rather have gone to Mrs Weir with the idea of helping her than of doing what was good for myself.

I sat still for some seconds, and thought; then I got up and said, I was very much obliged for the advice, and I would think about it.

'Ah! Ursie, lassie; you are not inclined to see the matter my

way,' exclaimed Mrs Kemp, 'and I am sure I would fain see it yours if I could ; but you will never help Mrs Weir if you begin by being a bone of contention with your own relations.'

'I will think about it ; I dare say you are right. Dear Mrs Kemp, I don't mean to be ungrateful, but I am very unhappy.' I could not help saying it, and the good woman laid her hand upon mine in a fondling way, and said she was so sorry ; and then we had a long talk about Sandcombe, and the ways of going on, and how I might help in mending matters if I went there ; and before we parted I felt I might be just as useful there as with Mrs Weir, and was heartily glad that the point was to be settled by William and Leah, and not by me.

There was little doubt what the end would be now ; in fact, the next day, a few words with William, who came over to Dene to see me, decided it. I could do fairly well with him when I had him alone, and he was kind enough in his way of putting things, and told me that Leah was quite willing to agree to the plan of my having time to myself after dinner, if I would only make myself useful in the morning, and look to the dairy and poultry, and see a little to the cooking. I had a misgiving that I should be put upon still, and I asked how Leah was going to manage about the other things which Jessie had been accustomed to attend to ; but I found that they had settled to have help from a girl who was to come every now and then, when she was wanted ; and, as William said, Jessie was not always with them, and so, if I was there, Leah would not be really worse off than before.

He looked quite pleased when everything was arranged, and talked so much about Sandcombe being my home, and how he had always wanted me to come, that before he went away I really did begin to think he had been very good-natured and brotherly about it, and I am quite sure he thought so himself. But when he was gone—oh dear ! Happily I had not much time for thought, except to be thankful that, at any rate, I had not pleased myself.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS WEIR'S new house was not exactly in Compton ; it might have been pleasanter for her if it had been. She would have been nearer the church and the parsonage. I don't

know that I could describe the situation well to any one unacquainted with the neighbourhood, and who did not know the kind of country that lay on the other side of St Anne's Hill, between it and the sea. But supposing a person was standing on the top of St Anne's facing the sea, and then was to go down the hill on that side, he would come to the top of a steep, jagged cliff, broken into uneven ledges, bare and sharp, except where here and there some green plant had taken root in the crevices, and managed to grow in spite of the fury of the south-west winds, which, in these parts, are the fiercest winds that blow.

Before coming to the top of the cliffs, it seems that there is nothing between them and the sea, but on reaching the edge there is a sight which makes a stranger start. For below lies, not the sea, but a broad tract of land, tossed up and down in little hills and valleys. It is scattered all over with huge rocks, which look as though giants had thrown them about in their play, and it slopes down in a steep descent towards the top of a second range of cliffs. This range cannot, of course, be discovered immediately underneath the upper cliffs, but it can be traced towards the west for many miles, forming the outline of Compton Bay. A dreary-looking country it is, but it has a charm even for that very reason. As a child I only saw it occasionally, and always thought of it as connected with haunts of smugglers, and wild storms; roaring waves, and shipwrecks, and heavy sea mists, gathering over the hills and shutting out the light, which was the only hope of the seamen's safety. It must have been a fierce time on earth when the land sank away from the upper cliffs, and the great rocks were hurled down, and the streams, which have now worked their way through the lower cliffs, and formed deep chasms, first began to flow. But those days are not within the memory of man that I ever heard. Yet even now it is solemn to stand and think of what once has been. When I first remember that part of the country it was, so to say, unknown and untraversed. There was no road through it. Persons wishing to go from Hatton to Compton had to go up Hatton Lane, and over the hill; only foot-passengers went over the cliffs, and with them it was a difficult task to find their way, especially on a dark night. They might stumble among the rocks, or wander to the edge of the cliffs, and be over before they were aware of it. Some people, at that time, thought it an unsafe country to live in, and said that the

rocks would fall again; but there was little enough really to fear, though certainly things did seem terrible to those who were unaccustomed to them.

Perhaps the country looks all the more wild from the contrast with that which immediately adjoins it. For, to the east of St Anne's Hill, just beyond Hatton, the land turns towards the south, and the warm sun shines full upon it. The ground is tossed about still in every direction, and huge rocks lie scattered upon it. But thorns, and chestnuts, and ash trees have sprung up amongst them upon the greensward; ivy has climbed up the ledges of the jagged cliffs; primroses cluster upon the banks; cowslips glitter on the turf; and masses of hyacinths may be seen in glades, half hidden by the foliage of the thick trees, and through which the jutting masses of gray rock peep out upon the open sea, sparkling with silver and blue, some hundreds of feet beneath them.

A lovely scene it is. There is a verse of a very different country, which often comes to my mind when I think of it. 'It is a land which the Lord thy God careth for. The eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. Sometimes it has even seemed to me that heaven itself can scarcely be more beautiful. But that is, doubtless, the thought of my ignorance, and the love which I bear to all things connected with the memories of my youth.

But I must go back to Compton and Mrs Weir. I have said that in former days there was no direct road from Hatton to Compton; a few years, however, before the time of which I am writing, it had been determined to make one under the upper cliff, at a great expense, and, as some persons thought, uselessly. That, however, was soon to be proved to be a mistake. Some speculating people bought up part of the land, and built an hotel and lodging-houses upon it, and Compton Heath, as the place was called, was likely to become, in time, an inhabited part of the world. It signified little enough to Mrs Weir where she went, for she was not likely to move out of the house often, when once she was settled in it; yet I could not help wishing that she had something more quiet and home-like to look out upon than that broad sea, without a ship to be seen upon it, and the bare rocks upon the Heath. There was, indeed, a beautiful view of the white cliffs in the distance; but everything immediately about the place, though grand, was desolate—except, indeed,

the garden ; but even that was new, and not likely to be kept in very good order by the old man who was in charge of it. He and his wife had the care of the place before Mrs Weir took it, and they were to live there still, and the woman was to do the cooking, and the man the gardening. Miss Milicent and I went many times backwards and forwards over the hill, from Dene to the Heath, before we had made the place at all what we thought Mrs Weir would think comfortable. Mrs Richardson helped us as well as she could ; but she was busy in the parish with the poor people, and at home with her children, and had but little time to spare ; and, indeed, it would have been unfair to expect her to do much. I found the neighbours very kind ; the people at the hotel lent us a helping hand, and the lieutenant, at the Preventive Station, and his wife took an interest in our goings on. I don't know how Miss Milicent became acquainted with them, but somehow she managed to know every one ; and I was rather glad to think that when she and her mother were settled in that out-of-the-way place, they would have a man friend near to apply to in a difficulty.

I had never yet told Mrs Weir exactly what my plans were, but I had given her to understand that I could not live with her for a continuance, and she took the notion more quietly than I had expected. As she said, she never looked forward, and I was with her for the time, and that was enough. But Miss Milicent was different. I had a struggle with her especially, the day before all was arranged for the move. I was to go over to the Heath in the afternoon, and she and her mother were to follow the next morning. First of all, I had thought that it would be better to stay and help the poor lady to the last at Dene ; but Mrs Kemp's hint was remembered, though I did not like it when it was given. Cotton, the lady's maid, was going to stay, so that Mrs Weir would have all the help in the way of dressing and nursing that she usually had ; and no doubt it was Miss Milicent's duty to look after her mother herself. She managed it in a certain way before I was even known to them, and so she ought to be able to manage it still. I said as much as this to her, only I hope civilly, when she suggested that it would be better for her to go and sleep at the Parsonage that night, and walk up to the Heath early the next morning, and get everything ready by the time her mother and I came in the afternoon.

'Mrs Weir is used to you in moving from home, Miss Mili-

cent,' I said, 'and she is not used to me; may be she would rather have you.'

'Now, Ursie Grant, you know that is not true,' she answered; 'whatever I am good for, it is not nursing, and I don't want to put myself forward in it.'

'This is not quite nursing,' I replied; 'and anyhow, Miss Milicent, as Mrs Weir has nobody but you to look to for the future, it won't do to be out of the habit of helping her.'

'I am so busy,' she said; 'I told Mr Perry (that was the preventive lieutenant), that I should be over at the Heath the first thing to-morrow morning, and bring Williams, the carpenter, with me; and then we would see about putting up some shelves, and unpacking the books.'

'I can take a message to Mr Perry, if it is needful,' I said; 'and I thought of sleeping in the house, and so I should be there to see about getting coffee when Mrs Weir arrived. I think I could show Jenny Dale how she likes it.'

'That old Jenny won't be able to make coffee or anything else to suit my mother's whimsies,' exclaimed Miss Milicent; 'she is as particular as a queen, as you know well enough, Ursie.'

'I could try and teach Jenny,' I said; 'and if not, Miss Milicent, you will be there the next day, and then I might show you.'

'And why can't you do it yourself, Ursie? you are not used to be so cross-grained.' And Miss Milicent turned round upon me sharply, with a look as of twenty eyes put into one.

'If it was so ordered that I could wait upon Mrs Weir always, it would be different,' I replied, 'but as I must needs leave her before very long, Miss Milicent, it would be better and kinder surely to put some one else in the way of pleasing her; and if Jenny Dale can't make the coffee, and you don't like to learn yourself, Cotton might try.'

'I tell you what, Ursie!' exclaimed Miss Milicent, angrily, 'I don't take it kind of you to make all this fuss about going away just at the very time we have most need of you; it is not what I should have expected of you, having known you so many years, and always been friends up to this time. It is very hard, very hard, indeed.'

'It is not my wish, Miss Milicent,' I replied, trying to speak gently, though I must confess her tone irritated me; 'but I have taken the advice of friends. One thing I can promise, if you will allow it,—not to leave Mrs Weir till she is really settled comfortably at the Heath, and able to go on by herself.'

‘And that will be never,’ exclaimed Miss Milicent. ‘Don’t you see that my mother is getting more full of whims and nervousness every day? And what am I to do with her? She never did attend to me.’

‘Perhaps because you never fell into her ways,’ I ventured to say.

‘You speak ignorantly, Ursie Grant,’ replied Miss Milicent, more quietly. ‘You have never known my mother as I have. Her ways, as you call them, have been for years ways which no one with a grain of sense could fall into, and they would have been twenty times worse but for me. Other people’—Miss Milicent stopped, I don’t think she liked to mention her father’s name—‘other people scolded her one minute and humoured her the next; that did no good.’

‘It might have been better,’ I said, ‘to humour her in the things that were rational, and try to persuade her out of those which were not.’

She waited before answering, and the colour rose in her cheeks; then she said, ‘You are right there, Ursie. But persons who humour and persuade must be made of different stuff from me. I can’t, and that is the truth, and so I must e’en go my way, and my mother must go hers; and things must be managed as they can: though how that is to be when you leave us is more than I can say.’

I felt for her. There was something about her which always touched me, when she changed from that sharp, headstrong manner to be in any way true and humble. It was a glimpse of a beautiful, better nature, lying, as it were, at the bottom of a deep sea tossed with tempests. And I knew, too, that she must have had a great deal to bear all her life long. Persons out of the family could put up with Mrs Weir’s oddities easily enough, but it was not so with those whose daily life was troubled by them. The whims of friends are an amusement: those of relations are trials. Only one thing I saw then, that Miss Milicent deceived herself by saying ‘can’t’ and ‘must.’ I believe there are not two more treacherous words in the English language. I did not say I would stay, though it was a strong temptation; but I repeated again that I was very sorry for her, and that I would take care not to leave her till Mrs Weir was comfortable. I added, though, that she must please let me go over to the Heath, for the work to be done there was much more fitting for me than for her.

She gave in, I do believe, because she was taken by surprise to find a will stronger than her own ; and about six o'clock that evening I took my bundle under my arm, and left Dene never again to return to it as my home.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE clouds were gathering and the wind was rising as I crossed the down at the foot of St Anne's Hill. I thought we should have a stormy night, indeed I was very certain of it, for there was the noise of a ground-swell telling me so more plainly than words. I walked on quickly, not exactly disliking the work before me, though feeling how strange it all was. I should have been miserable if I had gone direct from Dene to Sandcombe, but this go-between life softened matters, and there was something in the notion of being left to settle and decide things for myself and for others too, and in a certain fashion make my own way in the world, which gave me energy. As for Dene, the spirit of the place had departed when Roger left it. I loved the old familiar scenes dearly—it would be hard to say how dearly—but after he was gone I looked on them as upon the face of a friend who is dead. I knew I had better leave them, and remember them only as they were in the days of my peaceful happiness ; and I thanked God from my heart for the blessings He had granted me whilst living amongst them.

I made my way down a rough bank at the foot of the down, and then along a field into the high road, and so up to Heath Cottage—that was the name of Mrs Weir's new house. I mention the path I took, because it gives me an opportunity of saying what I did not before, that the high, broken, upper cliffs ended just above the cottage ; they seemed to break off by degrees and lose themselves in the slope of the down, so that the way I came was easy enough for a young person, though the descent from the down was very steep.

I thought, as I entered the garden, that the place was not half so trim as the grounds at Dene. The little bit of road and the sweep were full of rough stones, and the grass on the banks wanted mowing. I determined that should be done the first thing in the morning. Mrs Weir's neat eye would never bear

the look of the place as it was, though Miss Milicent would have lived there for years and never have thought about it. I saw no one at work about the garden, and when I went up to the house, and rang the bell, I waited a most provokingly long time for an answer. At length a little girl appeared, Jenny Dale's grandchild, who I knew was often with her. She stared at me with a pair of very blue eyes, and opened her mouth, but said nothing.

'Well, Polly! how d'ye do?' I said. 'Where's Granny. Can't I come in?'

'Granny's bad,' was the answer.

'Bad! I'm sorry for that. I must go and speak to her. Where is she?'

'She's a-bed.'

'So ill as that? How long has she been there?'

'Yesterday and t'other day.'

'But I saw her the day before yesterday,' I said; 'she didn't seem ill then. Has the doctor been here?'

'I don't know, she's a-bed:' was the only reply I could obtain; so I asked no more questions, but went in.

Jenny Dale was neat in her way, and her kitchen was comfortably enough generally—but Polly, being left to play there, had made it very untidy. The fire was burning low, and the tea-kettle had been taken off it, and was standing within the fender. A little deal table, with some crusts of bread soaked in spilt tea, and some cups waiting to be washed, were the signs that Dale and his grandchild had been having their meal together; but grandfather, I was told, was gone out, and Polly didn't know where he was gone, or when he meant to return,—in fact, she didn't know anything except that Granny was a-bed.

'And where is Granny sleeping?' I asked.

'Up yon!' and Polly pointed to a corner of the kitchen, where I saw nothing but the dish-covers upon the dresser.

There was a little room over one of the out-houses, as I knew, so I guessed what was meant; and putting some coals on the fire, I told Polly to wash up the tea-things, and make the place tidy; and up-stairs I went.

I heard a low groaning before I reached the top of the steep little staircase, and when I entered the bed room, I had no need to be told that 'Granny was very bad.' She was lying on a mattress on the floor, turning and rolling from side to side, with an attack of feverish cold and rheumatism. The wind, which was beginning to howl every minute louder and louder,

poured down in gusts from the little fire-place, close at the head of the bed, so that she had the full benefit of it. The room itself was draughty enough for a person in health; there was but one window, but that shook as if all the panes had been fastened together by pack-thread; and the door would not shut close; and all day long, and all night too—as I found afterwards—there was the moan of the wind through that and the window, even on a quiet day,—so any one may guess what it was likely to be on a stormy one. No doubt there are many worse places in which people sleep comfortably enough; but I confess it did provoke me that no one should have had the sense to move the bed a few inches to the left, where it might have been out of the way of the draught; and this was the first thing I tried to do. But Jenny was in no condition to bear being disturbed even for her own comfort. She was very bad, she said; she didn't know but what she was a-going to die. Daddy (as she called her husband) was gone for the doctor, and she hadn't no one but the little maid to wait upon her;—but for all I could say, she would not have anything, or do anything, or allow anything to be done for her. She would lie there with wind enough to turn a mill rushing upon her down the chimney. When I tried to pull the mattress along myself, she cried out as though I were going to cut off one of her legs; so at last I had nothing to do but to insist upon pinning a shawl across the fire-place to shut out the draught, and leave her till the doctor came.

A comfortable beginning, and a pleasant prospect for Mrs Weir the next day! But there was all the more reason for exertion; and as soon as I had made up the kitchen fire, and put the tea-kettle on, that I might have a little tea instead of supper, for I knew it would be more comforting. I went over the house to see what kind of state things were in. The drawing-room was habitable enough. It was a pretty little room with a deep, square window, commanding a lovely view of the bay and the whole cliff. In shape it was not so very unlike the drawing-room at Dene; and when the furniture was arranged properly, I thought Mrs Weir might rather take to it. But the dining-room was dark, and filled with boxes and rubbish; and in the passages, and up the stairs, litter of all kinds was lying about,—just the kind of litter which it was impossible to know what to do with. I hope I was not hard upon Miss Millicent, but I could not help thinking that it was because the last two or three times when furniture and books had been sent over from Dene, Miss Millicent had under-

taken to see the boxes unpacked at the cottage, and had taken things out and thrown them down anywhere, instead of arranging them as she went on.

Up-stairs, Mrs Weir's bed-room was what I should have called pretty and neat; but she would doubtless see fifty things that were wanted. It was a good size, which was the most important point in my eyes, and had a cheerful look-out towards the south-east, and a square window like the drawing-room. There was a dressing-room to it, besides another good-sized room for Miss Milicent, over the dining-room; and a little room which I was to have, and two attics.

I took off my bonnet and shawl, and then I went down-stairs and called Polly to come and help me clear some of the rubbish from the passage and the stairs. But it was growing dark, and we had scarcely begun our task, when Dale came back from Compton with the Doctor, who looked grave about Jenny, and said she must be well looked after, and he would send her some medicine, and come and see her again the first thing in the morning. I could not leave her without Polly after that, so I sent the child to sit with her, and went on with my work by myself.

I was standing a minute to rest myself, and looking out of the drawing-room window, trying to make out what was impossible to see because of the darkness that was coming, when I fancied I heard the front door bell ring. I listened, but not hearing it again, I thought it must have been my mistake; presently, however, I caught the sound of footsteps, and, going out into the passage, I saw two persons there, a little gentleman and a stout lady, strangers.

'Is Mrs Weir at home?' said the gentleman, in a meek voice.

'You had better ask for my cousin, my dear,' said the lady. 'We want to see Miss Weir,' she added, not waiting for him to answer. 'This is Mr Temple, and I am Mrs Temple, and we are just come. You had better go at once and announce us; now, my dear,' and she walked past him to go forward to the drawing-room. The gentleman followed.

'Mrs Weir is not here, ma'am,' I said, as soon as the opportunity for speaking was given me.

'Not here!' she stopped short; 'very provoking! You should not have brought me, my dear,' she added, addressing her husband. 'You should have come first to inquire. I told you there was just the chance of not finding them. I am quite exhausted'

The lady threw herself down in the arm-chair, her flounces spreading out, so as to make her three times the size she was naturally. To judge by her brilliant complexion, high colour, and clear sparkling eyes, she was not likely to be overcome by fatigue, but appearances are deceitful. The gentleman, who had been gifted by nature with a very meek countenance, which he had vainly endeavoured to render fierce by the help of a sandy moustache, stood by her submissively. She handed him a little bag, which she carried in her hand, and he took out a scent-bottle, and gave it her, though I don't believe he thought she was going to faint any more than I did.

'I am very sorry there has been any mistake, sir,' I said, 'but Mrs Weir is not expected till to-morrow. I am just come over myself to put things in order for her.'

'We can have beds here, I suppose?' said the lady.

'I am afraid, ma'am,' I replied, a little surprised, I must confess, at such a bold request, 'it could not be without Mrs Weir's knowledge.'

'I thought that being Mrs Weir's relations there might have been some accommodation for us,' said the gentleman.

'And Mrs Weir would wish it, I am sure,' replied the lady; 'in fact, we quite reckoned upon it.' She spoke angrily, and was evidently not at all inclined to faint now.

'I am very sorry,' I replied, 'but I could not take it upon myself, without Mrs Weir's permission; and indeed there is no room properly ready, except just where I am to sleep myself. Mrs Weir had no notion you were coming, sir.'

'It was a sudden thought,' replied the gentleman, 'but'—

'Young woman,' interrupted Mrs Temple, 'you will be sorry for being uncivil to us; your mistress will be much displeased when she hears of it. I am Mrs Weir's favourite niece. This gentleman is come to transact most important business with her, and he is not accustomed to disrespect; he never puts up with it. You had better at once go and prepare the rooms, and get us some tea, for we have had a very long journey. This is a most out-of-the way place; I wonder how any one can think of living in it,' she added, speaking to her husband.

'I am afraid I could not get tea to suit you, ma'am,' I replied. 'I don't know what there is in the house, and you will find everything very comfortable at the hotel, if you will please to go there to-night; and no doubt Mrs Weir and Miss Milicent will make everything easy to-morrow.'

'My dear—what do you—what do you think?' said Mr Temple.

'That I shall stay where I am,' she replied. 'The hotel is not to be put up with; it is too full. That room we were shown into was a mere hole.'

'You will be much better off there than here, ma'am,' I answered. 'There is no one to wait upon you here but myself.'

'And I suppose you know how to wait?' she answered.

'Not very well, ma'am. I am not Mrs Weir's servant. I only came over for a time to help arrange things for her, and I have much to do to-night; I don't think I could possibly undertake it.'

'Extremely uncivil!' exclaimed the lady. 'I shall go up-stairs and judge of the state of the house for myself.'

'If you please, ma'am,' I replied, but I did not offer to show her the way; I was quite confounded by her coolness.

'My dear,'—she beckoned to her husband to follow, and he went after her quite tamely. I heard her stumble over a box at the doorway, and hard work I knew they would have to make their way up-stairs, such a number of things were lying about; but it was all so much the better for me, for it gave me time to think, and whilst they were gone I sat down to consider what was to come next. A very odd business, certainly, it was.

Mrs Temple's name I had heard often enough, but I had never understood that there was much kindness between her and Mrs Weir, at least since her marriage, when there had been differences about money matters. What business she had to come troubling for Mrs Weir just at this time was more than I could guess. Of course I was unwilling to do anything disagreeable, but as to their sleeping in the house that night it was out of the question. Mrs Temple was so long away that it is my belief she must have gone up to the attics, but down-stairs she came at last.

'The room over this will do very well; you can make up the bed, and we shall not expect to have everything perfect. The dressing-room will be large enough for Mr Temple when you have moved out the boxes.'

'I could not well put you into Mrs Weir's room, ma'am,' I replied, 'it is kept for her; and the boxes, I fear, are too heavy to be moved. I am sorry to be unaccommodating, but if you will please to go to the hotel to-night, Mrs Weir will be here to make

her own arrangements to-morrow. I must ask you to excuse my leaving you now, as I have work to do.'

When I had said this I walked out of the room, for I was not going to discuss the point with her any further.

I heard them talking to each other, the lady's voice becoming louder and louder, as she seemed to be trying to convince her husband of something against his will; I did not go near them, however, but went up to see Jenny and give her her medicine, and then, as she seemed better, Polly and I set to work again by candlelight to clear away the rubbish. At last, when more than a quarter of an hour had gone by, Polly saw them go down the passage and out of the house door, and so we were rid of them.

I can't say I was comfortable; I did not know how I could have done differently, but I had been quite put out of my usual way. Ever since I could remember, I had been taught to treat persons according to their station, and though I was proud and wilful, yet I had a natural feeling of respect for persons better born and educated than myself. Even when Miss Milicent provoked me to speak out, as she sometimes did, it was more that I caught something of her off-hand tone before I was aware of it, than that I had the slightest intention of being uncivil; but Mrs Temple made something rise up in my heart quite unlike any other feeling. It was not for myself, I really think. She did not know who I was, and if I had tried to make her understand, I don't suppose I should have succeeded. But, besides the inconvenience of her request, she had claimed as a right what only ought to have been asked as a favour, and this was what I had never been accustomed to. Mrs Weir used to say to me sometimes in former days, 'Never take a liberty with any person, Ursula, and never let any one take a liberty with you; and then you will know how to behave in every position in which it may please God to place you.' I am sure she acted upon the advice herself, for all the time I was with her she never forgot that I had my own claims to respect and consideration, in spite of my inferior position.

Polly began asking questions about the visitors, and would have run out into the road after them, to look at them, if I would have allowed her; but I stopped her directly, and told her nothing. We worked on till nearly nine o'clock, and then I thought it was time to send her to bed. Dale had had his supper, and was gone up-stairs; so I had the kitchen to myself, and I stirred up the fire, which had been let down again very

low, and sat down, listening to the howling of the wind, and the dash of the waves upon the shore ; and thinking how much I should have to tell Roger when we met again. As a pleasant end to the evening, there was no milk in the house, and no butter,—so my hope of a warm, comforting tea, came to nothing ; but I contented myself with some bread and cheese, and a glass of beer, and after seeing that Jenny had everything she wanted, I went to bed, and, being quite tired out, soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MY new acquaintances did not intrude upon me the next morning. I suppose they had had enough of me. Polly said she saw them going down the cliffs to the sea ; but that was all I heard of them, and nearly all I thought about them, for there was business enough to take up every moment. Work as hard as I, and Dale, and Polly, and Williams the carpenter, and a girl from the village, could, it seemed as though the house never would be straight by the time Mrs Weir arrived. I was most anxious that it should be, for she was one of those persons with whom first impressions are everything ; and if, on coming to the Heath, she was to see the place untidy, I knew well enough she might take a prejudice which nothing would overcome.

Jenny was still quite ill, though the doctor spoke less gravely about her than he did the night before. But it was useless for her to think of moving ; and I had all her work to attend to as well as my own. Mrs Weir was to come to dinner, and a roast chicken was to be provided for her. Dale, and Polly, and I, dined off some cold mutton, without potatoes, and but little leisure we had to eat that.

About four o'clock the fly drove up to the gate. Williams had only time to gather up some of the carpentering tools, and rush out of the drawing-room window, whilst Polly carried away in her lap every scrap of litter she could see, before it was at the front door. My heart beat quite fast. It came over me all at once what a dreary thing the new home would be to Mrs Weir ; and when the flyman let down the step, and I went forward to give her my arm, I scarcely had courage to look in her face.

But I had no reason to be afraid. Mrs Weir was not a person to give way in great trials. She rested her hand upon my arm, but I did not feel it even tremble; and, when she stood upon the ground, the first words she said were, 'God is very good, Ursula; He gives us friends to receive us everywhere.' I hoped Miss Milicent would have come with her into the drawing-room, but she always left her mother to me when I was there, so I took the poor lady in myself. The strangeness of everything did then rather overcome her, and she sat down and cried a little, but they were very quiet tears,—not at all like those of a person who considered herself suffering from a great grief. She brightened up after a few minutes, and began admiring the room, and saying how comfortable it was. She was always gracious and thoughtful when people had been working for her. And then I thought of telling her a little about the time it had taken to put everything in order, thinking by that means to distract her thoughts. It was all very awkward and odd; I could not tell what to do next, and I was wishing to be in half a dozen places at once. But my work was soon settled, for in walked Miss Milicent, and with her Mr and Mrs Temple.

I can't say how cross I felt. Just at the very moment Mrs Weir wanted to rest and be alone! And Miss Milicent not to know better than to bring them straight into the drawing-room without notice! But it was exactly like her.

'Mother,' she said, and she went up to Mrs Weir, 'here is Matilda Temple, and her husband, too. They have been waiting to see you.'

Mrs Weir looked up as though in a dream; she made no answer.

Mr Temple held back, but his wife urged him on. 'I am afraid we have called at an awkward moment,' he began.

'Only it was impossible to resist the temptation,' interrupted Mrs Temple. 'Being in this part of the world, we felt you would consider it so unkind, my dear aunt, if we passed the house without coming in. And our time is so short,—only till to-morrow,—and there is so much to see,—such lovely scenery;' and then, putting her head a little to one side, and twisting her mouth, she added, 'Besides, it is so sweet to meet the friends one loves.'

I watched Mrs Weir's face all the time Mrs Temple was speaking, expecting to see something of anger or annoyance in it. But not the least! As gently and sweetly as ever, she

answered, 'I was not quite prepared to see you, Matilda; but Milicent and I will do our best to make you and Stephen welcome.'

'We must make ourselves welcome first, mother,' said Miss Milicent, bluntly. 'Cousin Matilda, I think you and Stephen had better go now, and come again by and by.'

'It is a very short peep,' said Mrs Temple.

'Ursula;' Mrs Weir turned to me. 'I think I feel rather tired. Matilda, you will excuse me. I am a little'—— Her voice failed her, and she looked extremely pale.

'Faint,' said Mrs Temple; she came forward to push me aside, and support Mrs Weir's head.

But I kept my place.

'If you will excuse me, ma'am,' I said, 'I think Mrs Weir is most used to me; and, Miss Milicent, if you would be good enough to pour out the sal volatile, and if Mrs Weir might be left quite alone.'

I was obliged to speak plainly, and Mr Temple took the hint, walked to the door, and looked back, expecting his wife to follow.

'Yes, go, my dear,' she said, nodding her head at him, 'I shall come presently; she will be better: it is only fatigue—nervousness. I dare say the pleasure of seeing us was a little too much. I shall come presently. Don't wait for me, my dear.'

I made sure Miss Milicent would have burst out then. She was not usually so cowed;—but no—she went out of the room, and sent Cotton in, and left her and Mrs Temple and me together.

No doubt it was fortunate for me that we were obliged to think of Mrs Weir instead of ourselves, or Mrs Temple and I might not have been such good friends. We had a difficult matter to bring Mrs Weir round. It was full a quarter of an hour before she recovered enough to speak, though I don't think she ever quite lost her consciousness. Mrs Temple was sensible and helpful enough in what she did, but the nonsense she talked was not to be imagined. She seemed to think it was quite fortunate that she happened to be there, and declared several times that she couldn't think how we should have managed without her. 'But all things were so providentially ordered,' she said. I don't believe it once entered her head that she had worried Mrs Weir by thrusting herself upon her at a wrong time.

At last, when it was a question of taking Mrs Weir up-stairs, I made a stand. Cotton and I knew very well what to do; and Mrs Temple should not come, I was resolved. I whispered to Mrs Weir to beg her to go; and the poor lady, in a very feeble voice, thanked her niece as though she had done the most self-denying act possible, and hoped to be better, and see her again in the evening.

I did not think even then that we should have got rid of her; but she twisted her mouth, and said it was a delightful privilege to be permitted to help a friend; and then she kissed Mrs Weir and departed.

All that evening Mrs Weir kept her room. Mr and Mrs Temple called again, but I urged Miss Milicent to send them down word that her mother was not well enough to see them, and so they were not admitted. And, as they were to go the next day, I pleased myself with thinking we should be left to arrange our own affairs without interruption, and that, if Mr Temple had business to talk over, he would just spend an hour with Mrs Weir in the morning, and there would be an end of it. But little I knew of Mrs Temple.

Mrs Weir was better the next morning; and a message came over from the hotel to say that Mr Temple would like to see her if she was able. What passed I don't exactly know. It was not a very long talk, and I don't expect it was one of much consequence, except that Mr Temple was anxious to put in a claim for some old debt, of a couple of hundred pounds, which, now that the Dene estate was sold, he thought might as well be paid off. A letter to the lawyer would have managed the business just as well, as far as I could ever understand; and, as to Mrs Temple being a favourite, Miss Milicent herself told me that her cousin Matilda had been the torment of the family for the last ten years, though her mother had always been willing to think the best of her.

Whilst Mr Temple was with Miss Milicent, Mrs Temple insisted upon going up-stairs to sit with Mrs Weir, and it was no use for me to try and prevent it, as I had to be in the kitchen looking after the cooking, Jenny being still too ill to move or do anything but sit up for about an hour, and there being no one at hand to take her place. I wondered to myself at what time Mrs Temple and her husband meant to go, and wished I could see a fly drive up to take them away, for I had a misgiving that we should have no peace till they were gone; but just as I had Mrs

Weir's luncheon ready, and was putting it on the tray to be taken up-stairs, down came Cotton from Mrs Weir's room.

'Well! Miss Grant,' she said (I was always called Miss Grant by the servants because of its being more respectful), 'what are we to do now? I should like to know how the house is to hold us all.'

'What is the matter?' I asked. 'Why won't the house hold us all to-day, as well as it did yesterday?'

'We filled it yesterday,' she answered; 'and when there are two more to be put in, I won't undertake to say where they are to be quartered.'

'Two more!' I said, and I felt very uncomfortable.

'Mr and Mrs Temple in the back room, and Miss Milicent in the little room, and then what is to become of you, Miss Grant? I would make a stir about it, that I would. I would not submit to be put up in the attic.'

'They can't come,' I said; 'it's nonsense.'

'They will come,' she answered, 'and it's no nonsense.'

I did not believe her—I could not; it seemed so monstrous. Mrs Weir being just come into the house, nothing arranged, and she herself ill and in great grief, and having lost so much of her fortune, I thought it impossible that any persons could have the face to accept such an invitation even if it had been made.

As for sleeping in the attic, I did not choose to talk about that with Cotton. If it had been a real benefit to any one, I would have slept in the kitchen or the scullery. It was not that I cared for, but the notion of having that dreadful woman entirely in the house, never to be free from her; for the moment I did think that I must give up, and go off at once to Sandcombe.

'The luncheon will be cold if you don't take it up at once,' I said to Cotton, trying not to show that I thought anything of her news.

'Not so cold as somebody's welcome should be, if I had my will,' she replied; 'but you are very strange, Miss Grant. I don't think you know a bit when you are put upon.'

Cotton was wrong; I did know very well; but when persons serve for love, their shoulders can bear a tolerably heavy burden.

As we were speaking, Miss Milicent came out from the drawing-room, looking feverish and hurried. She sent Cotton away, and then said, 'Ursie, what have we got in the house? We must have dinner at six o'clock.'

'There are some cutlets and the remains of the chicken, which I was going to fricassee,' I said; 'I thought, with a bit of bacon and a pudding, that would be enough, Miss Milicent, for you and Mrs Weir.'

'You had better get a leg of lamb, Ursie. Mr and Mrs Temple are likely to be here.'

'To stay, ma'am?' I said, for I thought I would have it out with her at once.

'That is as may be,' she answered, gruffly. 'They won't stay for my asking, but my mother is so easily talked over. She has no more power of saying "No" than a baby. And as for Matilda Temple, she would come over a hyena.'

'Then I am sure, Miss Milicent, I am worse than a hyena,' I said, and I could not help laughing, vexed though I was. 'She would never come over me; you will excuse my saying so.'

'Don't boast, Ursie; you have never had to do with her. You see if she is not come to quarter herself upon us for a month, and neither you nor I, nor any one will be able to say her nay.'

'But indeed, Miss Milicent,' I exclaimed, 'it ought not to be. She will drive Mrs Weir out of her senses. It is my belief that it was seeing her helped to make the poor lady faint yesterday.'

'If she was dying, Matilda Temple would stick by her,' exclaimed Miss Milicent; 'and talk good all the time, till she thought herself a saint, and made my mother think so too.'

'And where are Mr and Mrs Temple to sleep, ma'am?' I asked.

'I shall take to the attic,' said Miss Milicent.

'Oh! no indeed,' I exclaimed; 'that must not be, Miss Milicent. There is my room, quite ready. I will move my things in a minute, and the attic is quite as good as I shall want.'

'It won't be, Ursie Grant,' she replied, catching hold of my arm, as was her habit; 'my mother won't allow it, and, what is more, if she would I would not. When you came to help us in our troubles we promised you a comfortable room, and we aren't going to have it taken from you by any one.'

'Only if I give it up, it is not taken from me,' I said; 'and, indeed, Miss Milicent, it is not fitting; I could not stay here, with you sleeping in the attic, and me in the room below.'

She would make no reply, but went off, and I heard her tell Fanny to come and help carry her boxes up-stairs.

It touched me, I confess. I did not believe she had so much

thought, but it made me very uncomfortable ; for really, as I said, it was unfitting, and I had a kind of fear that it would make mischief.

I took the opportunity of going up-stairs to Mrs Weir, under pretence of carrying away the luncheon, and, fortunately, I found her by herself. Cotton had persuaded her to get up and dress, and she was sitting by the window.

‘I was not prepared to see you there, ma’am,’ I said ; ‘I fancied you wouldn’t get up till the afternoon.’

‘I feel better, thank you, Ursula, and lying in bed only weakens me ; besides, I have had a visitor.’

‘I was afraid Mrs Temple would have been too much for you, ma’am. Seeing her did you harm yesterday.’

‘No, Ursula, it only startled me a little. Mrs Temple is a very good woman, and when she talks to me, she reminds me of many things which I am too apt to forget.’

‘Indeed, ma’am,’ was all I could say.

‘She has been very well brought up,’ continued Mrs Weir, ‘and she has done a great deal for her husband. He was very extravagant as a young man, and she has quite cured him, and now he gives all his money to charities. He owes her a great deal.’

‘And no doubt she takes care to make him pay it,’ was the uncharitable thought which crossed my mind, but I answered by asking if Mrs Temple was likely to remain long in the neighbourhood.

‘I have persuaded her to stay for three or four days, Ursula. She has never seen this part of the country, and she wishes to do so very much, but she cannot be at the hotel. She cannot bear it ; it is noisy, and she is not strong.’

‘Persons who travel can scarcely expect to meet with the same quietness they have at home,’ I replied ; ‘but I never heard any complaint of the hotel, ma’am.’

‘Mrs Temple does not complain. She says, very rightly, that the worst accommodation is better than creatures like ourselves deserve. Indeed, she made me ashamed of being so particular myself. I hope you will forgive me, Ursula, if I have ever given you trouble by it. I have been very much spoiled.’

I saw a tear glisten in the poor lady’s eye, and I ventured to take her hand, and say, ‘Dear ma’am, if you will please not talk so, twenty times the trouble would be nothing in return for the goodness and kindness you have shown to me for years.’

'Ah! but, Ursula, it is not right to let the mind rest upon these trifles. Mrs Temple is not fanciful as I am. When I told her that I was afraid the bed in Millicent's room might be hard, she assured me she could sleep upon the ground if needful.'

'Perhaps Mr Temple may be more fidgety, ma'am,' I observed; for I could not help noticing how entirely the good gentleman was put aside, even by Mrs Weir.

'Ah! Ursula, Mrs Temple has done so much for her husband in that respect, as well as in many others. She says that he is a changed man since she first knew him. He has no wish for fine carpets and curtains, and soft beds, and sofas. He desires nothing but quietness. That is an excellent influence for a wife to exercise.'

Mrs Weir sighed, and I knew that she was in her heart reproaching herself for having encouraged her husband in extravagance by her own fancifulness.

'They will find the room small, ma'am,' I said; 'and I don't quite know what to do about the dressing-room. Fanny and I had thought of filling it with the things we couldn't put elsewhere.'

A harassed look came over Mrs Weir's face; it always did when there was the least fuss about arrangements. Her brow contracted, and there was a heavy darkness across her eyes. I saw it would not do to make more objections.

'You can fill my room, Ursula, if you like. I am not going to be so particular as I have been. What does it signify? I shall soon be out of this world.'

'But those who love you, dear ma'am,' I said, 'will take care that you shall be comfortable whilst you are in it. Please don't trouble yourself; we shall manage, I dare say; and it won't be for long, I suppose.'

'Only for two days, Ursula. Mrs Temple is obliged to be at home. She is making preparations for a charity bazaar; so she cannot stay. I have promised to look over my things, and see what I can spare for her. I was just thinking, when you came up, that you might, if you would, be kind enough to unpack one of my boxes, and help me to choose.'

I am afraid I felt very unwilling; but as I did not venture actually to say 'No,' I replied that, if I might be allowed, I would rather wait just now, for I had to go to see about dinner.

'Thank you, by and by will do very well; or, perhaps, Cotton will bring the box.'

Already in my mind I saw Mrs Temple fingering all the pretty little toys and ornaments in which Mrs Weir found pleasure, and my heart swelled, so that I really could not answer. But there was no escape. Mrs Weir's mind, I could see, was possessed with the notion of giving up something she cared for. What that tiresome woman had been saying to her, I was unable to imagine.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MISS MILICENT took possession of the attic, in spite of all I could say, and Mr and Mrs Temple were put into her room; and, as it seemed, were likely long to remain there. As for going away in two days, I was sure from the beginning what that would come to. If ever there was a woman who might be called a burr, it was Mrs Temple. Once let her come near you, and, as Miss Milicent said, she would stick to you through everything. You might cast her off one minute, and think you were rid of her, and the next you were sure to find her clinging to you again. When the two days were over, she declared herself to be wonderfully better for the sea air, and Mrs Weir was very pleased, really so, I do believe; she was pleased at anything which did good. Mrs Temple was pressed to stay. I remembered the charity bazaar; but if there were really going to be one, there was certainly no hurry in preparing for it. Not but what it was still talked about. Mrs Temple was always collecting sea-weeds out of doors, or cutting up bits of cardboard in doors, liking, she said, to employ her time usefully; and I take it for granted it was all useful, for even Miss Milicent was drawn in by her, and made to search for stones and specimens, as Mrs Temple called them, all which were to go to the charity bazaar.

In a week the house had settled down as though Mrs Temple had lived there, and meant to live there, always. But it was just the contrary with me; having her there opened my eyes to one thing—that I was not so necessary to Mrs Weir as I imagined. It was not a pleasant discovery, but it made me see how selfish I might be, even in what appeared to be my best feelings. What Mrs Weir wanted was a little sympathy and amusement; and when she could obtain this, her life was tolerably comfortable;

for she was like a child, accustomed to live just for the day, and to trust everything to others. The very weight of the cares and griefs which had burdened her for so many years, I believe, forced her to this. Her husband had made her helpless, and kept her so; and now nothing roused her except some great call of what she considered duty, such as that which had made her dwell so much upon the thought of rejoining Mr Weir. If that notion were to come up again, I knew she would startle us all by her energy; but now she was sinking down into a kind of life which sometimes made me think of the beautiful sea anemones found upon the shore—half vegetable and half animal—moving their long feelers, and searching, as it were, for something, they scarcely knew what; yet contented to remain in one peace, and appearing to find a kind of solace in spreading themselves out in the sun, and taking thankfully the light and air which God, in His wonderful Wisdom, had provided for them.

It is happy for us, I am sure, that we do not all need the same comfort. I should never have found mine where Mrs Weir did, in Mrs Temple's society; but in saying this, I don't in the least mean that I was, therefore, in any way better or wiser than Mrs Weir—quite the contrary. It was the very goodness and simplicity which I never could attain to that made her take for reality what always seemed to me mere outside show. Mrs Temple showed herself to me the first night I ever saw her; she was off her guard then, and the impression I had of her remained by me. Perhaps, but for that, I too might have been deluded by her. But I don't know; there is something in true kindness and goodness, which I fancy can never be counterfeited. All the fine talking and appearance of sympathy, which Mrs Weir had such faith in, sounded to me hollow from the beginning; and I could not but see by Mrs Temple's words and ways that she had one great besetting sin, which, as far as I could discover, she was totally blind to. She was a thoroughly mean woman about money matters. She had not been well, and she wanted change and sea air; that was the history of her visit to Compton Heath; and as days went on, I saw that she had made up her mind from the beginning to come and quarter herself upon Mrs Weir, not for one or two nights, but for a month, or six weeks, or any time that might suit her. But she would not have said it for the world. No, all the time it was, that she was so anxious to go, only her aunt pressed her to stay, and seemed to enjoy a little sympathy and affectionate companionship so much, that

really, in her distressed state,—a state worse than widowhood,—she could not make up her mind to leave her.

It was all quite true about Mrs Weir ; she did like it, at least in a certain way, and for a time. To me, it was just like having a wet blanket thrown over me to hear Mrs Temple converse, especially when she touched upon serious subjects. I never knew what to say, or which way to look ; and though I could have listened to Mrs Weir for hours, when she talked to me in her earnest, simple way, I never heard one of Mrs Temple's set speeches without feeling as though I wished a trap-door could open in the floor, and I might sink down and hide myself. But dear, good Mrs Weir took it all in like a sermon. She was so sincere herself that she could not suspect others of make-believe ; and constant sorrow, and thinking of serious matters, and living in that strange, dreamy way, out of the world, made her prepared at all times for subjects which came to other people with a shock and a jar.

Miss Milicent and I had a little conversation upon this subject one day. It was after we had been at the Heath about three weeks, and I had received a letter from Roger, saying he had finished his business in London, and was coming down the next week to Sandcombe, and asking if I could go over and see him, if it was only for a few days. As things were, it struck me, that I might just as well make my move once for all. There might never be a better moment ; and that afternoon, when Miss Milicent came into the kitchen to give some orders, I determined to propose it to her. I was standing there, showing Cotton how to make Mrs Weir's coffee,—for Jenny Dale, though she was pretty well again, and able to cook, had never managed to make coffee to please Mrs Weir.

'I should like to speak to you, if you please, Miss Milicent,' I said, 'if you are not busy.'

'Yes, I am busy ; I always am,' she answered, and true enough it did appear that she ought to be busy, even if she was not, for it would have taken full ten minutes, rightly, to put herself tidy. She had been down upon the shore, getting sea-weeds, and crabs, and crawling things, to be placed in a glass, for Mrs Temple ; I suppose for the charity bazaar. Such a mass of mud on her short tucked-up dress, and such boots ! and the pockets of her loose jacket stuck full of stones and shells, and her bonnet all awry ; if I had not seen her nearly the same every day, for the last fortnight, I don't think I could have kept from a smile.

But I tried to be very respectful, knowing my temptation the other way, and I said, 'I wouldn't trouble you if you are really busy, Miss Milicent, but I have had a letter this morning, and I thought I should like to talk to you about it.'

'A letter, have you? Oh!'

Miss Milicent's look grew softer. She took a real interest in Roger, and must have guessed the letter was from him; but she still went her own way.

'I want some brown pans, Jenny,' she said, 'flat pans; and where is the sea-water Dale brought up from the shore? Here are beautiful things to be cared for,' and she uncovered a basket, and showed a mass of slimy-looking coloured jelly, lying upon stones and sea-weeds, with tiny crabs and periwinkles, and all kinds of uncouth creatures, crawling about amongst them.

'They things had best have stayed where they were born, it's my opinion,' said Jenny; 'they don't look natural-like here. What am I to do with them, Miss Milicent?'

As she spoke, Jenny poked one of them with a skewer, and then started back, declaring 'she wouldn't, for the life of her, have anything to do with it. If she might put it in the pot and boil it, she wouldn't so much care, but live jelly was what she was not used to.'

I brought the pans from the scullery myself, and Miss Milicent and I moved her creatures, as she called them, into it, and then, as they began to unfold in the clear water, Jenny ventured to look in upon them, and, in spite of her declarations, that 'they weren't canny, and she couldn't abide them,' we left her standing by the pans and poking them about with the skewer.

All this time Miss Milicent seemed to have no thought for my business, but when her own was finished she said, 'Now, Ursie Grant, if you choose to come to the dining-room, I can see the letter,' and away she walked, expecting me to follow her.

We went into the dining-room, and she shut to the door. 'Well! what is the mischief?' she began.

'That Roger is coming to Sandcombe, Miss Milicent, and I think it is time for me to be going,' I replied.

'You have taken an uppish fit, have you?' she replied. 'I thought it would come to this; Mrs Temple said it yesterday.'

'Mrs Temple!' I exclaimed.

'Yes! she is a sharp woman, though not after my fancy in all things. She said she saw it in you the first night she came;

and I have a doubt that you were not too civil to her then, Ursie Grant.'

I was upon the point of explaining, but I remembered that evil words multiply by being taken up and cut to pieces, like the creatures Miss Milicent had just brought into the kitchen, so I let Mrs Temple's unkind remarks pass, and answered, 'You would scarcely have said that, Miss Milicent, if you had known all that went on. But I don't know what I have done to make you or any one call me uppish. It can't be because I talk of going away, for that has been settled ever since I came.'

'I knew how it would be,' persisted Miss Milicent, in her odd way, carrying on her own words just as though I had not spoken. 'Matilda Temple said she was sure you would never go on long, dining in the kitchen with old Dale and his wife, and not having a place to sit in except your bedroom. She was wrong, though, in one thing, as I told her, for it was my own will to go to the attic.'

'O Miss Milicent!' I exclaimed, 'how can you listen to Mrs Temple; did I ever complain?'

'No; but you are going away.'

'But not for that,' I replied, and I felt the angry colour rush to my cheek. 'If there is one thing I hate more than another, it is taking upon one's self to have airs, and being above doing what is kind and helping. I would dine with old Dale, and sit in my bedroom from this hour till the day of my death, if it was my duty, and could comfort any one, much more be of use to Mrs Weir, and you know it, Miss Milicent. You don't really believe Mrs Temple; if you did, it would be a hard struggle with me to keep from walking out of the house and never entering it again.'

'I was wrong, Ursie,' she said, and she stretched out her large hand, stained with the marks of the mud and sea-weed she had been handling, and gave me something between a pat and a shake. 'But it comes over me, and that's the truth, and if Mr Temple and Matilda weren't here, I think I should run away.'

'I fancied you didn't like their staying,' I observed.

'No, I had rather have you than them, any day, but I had rather have them than nobody. Don't you see how quiet my mother has been since Mrs Temple has taken to being with her?'

'Just for the time,' I said; 'but Mrs Weir must see through it some day, Miss Milicent, as you and I do.'

'She may, and she mayn't; anyhow, it helps for the time.'

'O Miss Milicent!' I exclaimed, 'can you bear to see the good lady deceived, and made to rest upon another, when you, her own flesh and blood, that could be everything to her, are close at hand?'

I had never spoken so plainly before, and I was afraid how my words might be taken. Miss Milicent winced a little, but she had a way of turning off from any subject she disliked, and making an excuse by finding fault with some one else. That was how she managed to deceive herself upon this one point, and so I suppose it is with us all.

'My mother is very queer, Ursie,' she said, 'as you well know, and ever since I can remember, she has looked for comfort out of her own family. The doctors say it's health, and I dare say it is; but whether or not, I can't please her, and if she chooses to be taken in by Matilda Temple, why she must be.'

'But it will work some harm in the end, for certain,' I said. 'You don't trust Mrs Temple yourself, Miss Milicent.'

'Not I, not for a moment; yet she is not such a hypocrite as you think, Ursie. She humbugs herself just as much as she does other people.'

That was seeing deeper than I should have given Miss Milicent credit for, and I asked her what she meant.

'Why, just this,' she replied; 'I have lived a good deal with Matilda Temple, and seen how things went on. She was very badly brought up as a child, left quite to her own ways. She never knew how to be honest and open like others, and she loved nothing but herself. Then her mother died, and she went to live with a kind of cousin, a Mrs Frere, a good woman—yes, a good woman, if ever there lived one upon earth, but one who was always lecturing and talking of religion. I could not endure her fashion of going on myself, and I ran away from her whenever I saw her, yet I respected her. But with Matilda it was different; she learned to talk the same as her cousin, and Mrs Frere thought her an excellent, good child, because she could quote texts, and said she liked to hear sermons, and Matilda thought so herself, and she thinks so now, and nobody has ever told her differently. She has her notion of goodness, and she acts up to it.'

'If she had read her Bible, she might have found out that it

was not the right notion, I should have thought,' was my reply. 'To be sure, I have seen but little of her, but her ways do strike me as being shabby.'

'Shabby! she is the shabbiest woman, and the proudest, in England,' said Miss Milicent, 'and the cleverest, besides. We must take all our dose of religion, Ursie, that we know; but I suppose we like to take it our own way. Matilda Temple wraps up hers in talk, and makes it a good size, and then she swallows it whole, and so it never tastes unpleasant.'

I did not answer directly—I could not. It came over me with such a terrible dread, that we might all be doing the same in some way or other. I could see it in Miss Milicent herself, clear-sighted though she was to Mrs Temple's shortcomings, and there was I, perhaps as great a self-deceiver as either.

Miss Milicent continued, 'It is not to be wondered at that Matilda Temple should think much of herself. There's her little husband obeys her like a black slave.'

'And it is true, then,' I said, 'what Mrs Weir told me, that she had saved him from being extravagant?'

'Oh yes! saved him from that, and from a great deal else, and made him nearly as shabby as herself; only I must say one thing for him, it goes against the grain.'

'Really, Miss Milicent,' I exclaimed, 'you do surprise me. If you think of your cousins in this way, how can you bear to have them here?'

'Because anything is better than being forced to give in to another person's fancies all day, Ursie Grant. I must have liberty. It is bad enough anyhow, to be set down in a corner of the world like this, but if I am to sit in-doors week after week, and talk twaddle, I shall fall ill. That is the truth.'

'Yet there are some hours when Mrs Weir likes to be alone,' I ventured to say.

'Maybe, but you don't understand; no one can. Parents and children, and brothers and sisters, are not like other people. I dare say you think I am undutiful; I dare say I am.'

I must have looked shocked, for I always thought that if I had a mother living I should feel it such a pleasure and an honour to do everything for her. But Miss Milicent was better than her word, I knew, and I am sure that her conscience reproached her, after she had spoken in this off-hand way, for she went on: 'You know, Ursie, there's no one but you that can suit me and my mother also, and it's the plain fact; and if w'

can have you here, everything will go well ; and if we have not, we must have Matilda Temple, or any one we can get, and take the consequences. And who is to answer for them ?'

Without waiting for me to reply, she went away, seemingly in a huff.

This sudden end to our conversation was like a gust of wind. It took up all my ideas, and turned them round, as it were, till I did not know where I was. Just for one moment I thought Miss Milicent was right, and that I was answerable for whatever might happen, if Mrs Temple stayed and I went away ; but I soon saw the folly of such an idea. God has only given us one conscience to take care of, and trouble enough it is to keep that clear of offence. If I went my own straightforward way, I was not answerable for the crookedness of other people's. And I saw, too, what Mrs Kemp had first put into my head, that my staying only blinded Miss Milicent more to her own duties. I sought no more conversation, but went up-stairs to my own room, and wrote a letter to Roger, telling him, that nothing preventing, I would be at Sandcombe, if William and Leah could receive me, that day week.

CHAPTER XXV.

MY stay with Mrs Weir was about to terminate less pleasantly than I had expected. I seemed to have done but little good to her, and less to Miss Milicent, and I knew that I left a snake in the grass behind me in Mrs Temple. But for Mrs Kemp's warning, I might have been even more disappointed, but I was learning (very slowly, though, for it was a hard lesson to one of my disposition) to make doing my duty my object, without caring for seeing the fruits. Miss Milicent was surly when she found I was resolved to go. Mrs Temple, who had scarcely noticed me before, became suddenly very patronising and amiable ; and poor Mrs Weir, to whom I broke the news as gently as I could, cried a good deal, and said if God ever made her rich again, she would send for me, and beg me to come back and live with her ; but her mind was for the time finding a new rest, and when the day of my departure drew near, she was consoled by Mrs Temple's promise of staying with her another

fortnight. Her conscience, indeed, was a little troubled about Mr Temple, who, she said, must find it so dull to be living there with three ladies; but Mrs Temple assured her, that solitude and contemplation were his delight, and if it was so, he certainly must have been in Paradise all the time he was at the Heath, for he wandered about on the rocks and by the shore all day, and never spoke to any one, except I believe to Mr Perry, the preventive lieutenant. He was a meek man now, and gifted with much endurance, whatever he might have been formerly. I never heard him say anything in opposition to his wife except, 'Perhaps it would be better not, my dear.'

On the day fixed, William's cart was to be sent for me and my boxes. It was to go into Hove first, and to come back by Compton, so that I was not likely to leave till the evening. All the afternoon, Miss Milicent was in and out of my room, upon some pretence or another, talking about all kinds of things in a rambling way, and often in a very cross tone, especially prophesying that everything would go wrong when I was gone, and as the climax of evil, declaring that neither Jenny Dale nor Cotton would ever know how to make her mother's coffee. When the last box was packed, and just going to be corded, she brought in a beautiful, large prayer-book, with a very clear print. 'There is no room for it,' she said, as she put it down upon the top of my frilled collars.

I took it out and looked at it. She had written in it 'Ursula Grant,' nothing more.

'O Miss Milicent!' I exclaimed, 'it is very good of you, and I shall value it so much.'

'I have crumpled your frills,' she said; 'you had better give up wearing frills, Ursie Grant. There will be no time for getting them up at Sandcombe.'

'I don't care about the frills,' I replied; 'but if you would please, Miss Milicent, to put your name in the book too, I should be greatly obliged.'

'I have put enough to prevent its being stolen,' she said.

I could get nothing more from her. She would put the book into the box herself, hiding it underneath, as though she was ashamed of it, and not allowing me to say another word of thanks.

Fanny came to tell me the cart was ready, and to help me carry down my boxes; but Miss Milicent peeped over the stairs,

and told her to go and fetch Dale,—her mother wanted me—and I went to Mrs Weir.

Mrs Temple was with her. 'A pleasant afternoon you have for your drive, Ursula,' she said, before Mrs Weir could speak; 'I hope you will enjoy it!'

'Thank you, ma'am,' was all my reply; it always made me feel cross when she called me Ursula, though I don't know what other name she could well have given me.

'I had a commission to be executed in Hatton;' she continued, 'and I felt sure that you would be glad to attend to it for me. The Compton carpenter charges more than I think right for the little work-frame he made for me the other day; and I wish you to see the other man,—I forget his name,—at Hatton, and inquire what he would do the same for; I shall not pay more than he says.'

'The frame cost eighteen pence, I believe, ma'am,' I said.

'Yes, and it ought to have been only fifteen. I could have had it made for fifteen at home; but these country people are very exorbitant, and it is not right to encourage them, dear aunt, is it?' and she addressed Mrs Weir.

'I dare say not, my dear. I generally give what they ask, but then I am not a person of business.'

'It was Smithson who made the frame, I think, ma'am,' I said.

'Yes, Smithson, I believe, was the name.'

'He is very poor, and not a very good workman,' I continued, 'and I think, ma'am, you had the frame taken back twice.'

Mrs Temple's black eyes flashed as they did the first night I ever saw her.

'Is that Smithson, whose wife had twins last week?' asked Mrs Weir.

'Yes, ma'am; and Miss Milicent, if you remember, sent her some gruel. His girl goes to Compton school.'

'I remember. Pray, Ursula, take care'—but poor Mrs Weir stopped short, and I saw a tear in her eye; 'you are going away, Ursula, I must not trouble you. Matilda, I should like Milicent to see what the poor woman wants. It must be a great trial to have two babies at a time.'

'Certainly, dear aunt. I have no doubt that Milicent will do all that is necessary, if it is a deserving case; but the man, I should fear, is not honest. However, I will not trouble Ursula Grant to make inquiries for me about him; I forgot that I was

speaking to a person who took care to inform me, the first night I saw her, that she was not Mrs Weir's servant.

There was a little red spot upon Mrs Weir's cheek, burning and increasing. Her eyes turned uneasily from one to the other; I don't think anything ever so perplexed her as anger. Mrs Temple rose haughtily; I think she fancied I was going to reply, and that she should put me down; but I merely said to Mrs Weir, 'Dear ma'am, the cart is come; I think, if you please, I must go.'

'Perhaps, Matilda, if you would not mind,—I think I should like to speak to Ursula alone.'

Mrs Temple said not a word, but walked out of the room, like a tragedy queen, I was going to say, only I never saw one, though I have heard people talk of them.

Mrs Weir held my hands fast in hers, not even trying to speak; but the tears coursing each other down her face.

'I must come over again, and see you very soon, ma'am,' I said.

'Yes, you are not going away far, I desire to remember that. But, Ursula, I won't keep you; do you think you could sit down?' It was one of her little fancies, that she could not bear to see any one standing; it gave her the notion of hurry. I sat down. She pointed to an Indian box on her work-table. 'I wished to show you before you went; I have chosen my things for Mrs Temple's charity. I asked Milicent to look at them, but she said there were enough without them. But I desire to give them, Ursula. God gave them to me, and I should like to give them back to Him.'

I brought the box to her, and she unlocked it, took the things out, one by one, and ranged them in order upon the table. They were nearly all foreign, and mostly Indian; and some of them so delicate, that it seemed as though any other fingers than Mrs Weir's would have been unable to handle them. Particularly I remember a little chess-board of carved ivory, with the tiniest set of chessmen that can be imagined standing upon it. It had been sent her only a few months before; and she had taken the trouble herself to fasten the little figures upon the board with gum. It used to stand upon the table at Dene, with a glass case over it; but I had not seen it since we came to the cottage.

She looked at her pretty things as a child might have done, when they were all put before her. Just for the moment she seemed to have forgotten that they were to be parted with.

‘Perhaps they will not be wanted, ma’am,’ I ventured to say; for I felt quite a silly dislike to her giving them away.

‘Do you think so, Ursula?’ She seemed pained at the notion.

‘Mrs Temple says they will make her stall very beautiful.’

‘I dare say they will, ma’am,’ I answered, shortly.

‘And it ought not to be a sacrifice to me,’ she continued. ‘They are very little things; I do not know why I liked them so much.’

It was upon my lips to say that I should not care what was done with them, if they were to go for a good object; but I stopped myself,—God looks at motives, not objects. No doubt in His sight it was a holy offering. I could not take upon myself to cast a doubt into Mrs Weir’s mind, though in my heart I felt that I could have seen the things thrown into the sea, rather than put into Mrs Temple’s hands, to give her the opportunity of making a show without expense.

‘And you think they are enough, Ursula?’ added Mrs Weir, simply.

‘Quite, ma’am,’ I said. ‘I don’t know how Mrs Temple will contrive to take them.’

‘And I shall learn to do without them,’ she continued. ‘Mrs Temple has written out a text for me, Ursula, and I have put it in my work-box, that I may remember to try and not care for all which I have cared for. She has made it very pretty; it is illuminated.’

I could scarcely help smiling. The poor lady’s taste for pretty things was so strong, in spite of all she did to overcome it. Mrs Temple had written the text upon perforated cardboard, and the capital letters were coloured.

The words were, ‘We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.’ I returned the text, merely saying, that I wished we could all remember it; it might save us a great deal of anxiety. It did not strike me till afterwards what a wonderful power God has given to simple earnestness of heart. Mrs Weir was like the bee, she could only extract honey even from intercourse with a woman like Mrs Temple.

‘And you must go now, Ursula,’ she said, as I went up to her, after putting the carved box back into its place.

‘Yes, dear ma’am, I think I must. I know my brother would rather the cart should not be kept.’

‘And you will see Mr Grant at Sandcombe, I suppose. That will make you happy.’

My heart was too full for a reply. Mrs Weir continued, ‘I wish you to be happy, Ursula. I pray God to make you so. You have not been able to make me happy, but you have comforted me.’

‘Not so much as you have comforted me, ma’am,’ I said. ‘You have taught me things which I shall remember all my life.’

She clasped her little thin hands together. ‘God be thanked for it, Ursula. I had a hope once that I should live actively to His glory; but now I can only “stand and wait.” I should like to ask you to mention my name in your prayers,—only you will have so many to think of.’

I caught hold of her hand and kissed it.

‘Do you think I could ever forget it, dear ma’am?’ I said. ‘But I don’t like to think I am going away. I shall hope to come and see you very often; and you must always tell me what I can do for you.’

‘I thank you, Ursula; I know I may depend upon you. But Mrs Temple says that I have accustomed myself to lean upon you too much.’

I believe I gave an angry start. Mrs Weir did not notice it. ‘I have a little book,’ she continued, ‘which I should wish you to keep for my sake; it is Bishop Wilson’s “*Sacra Privata*.” Mrs Temple recommended another, but I was not sure you would like it. I am afraid I vexed her by choosing this; but you have often read part of it to me, and so I thought it would help you to remember me.’

She put into my hands a tiny book, bound in purple morocco, quite plain, except that the edges were gilt. My name was written in it,—‘Ursula Grant, from her sincere friend, Margaret Weir,’—and beneath, that text from the First Epistle of St Peter,—‘But the God of all grace, who hath called you unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.’ The words ‘after ye have suffered a while’ were underlined.

Mrs Weir pointed to them. ‘I would not have you without suffering, Ursula,’ she said. ‘It is the highway to the peace that passeth understanding. God bless you.’

It was all I could do not to break down, but I thanked her in

few words and a troubled voice, and left her with a heart full of love ; yet fearing, lest with Mrs Temple by her side, she might one day cease to care for me.

CHAPTER XXVI.

I EXPECTED to meet Roger at Sandcombe, and yet I could think of Mrs Weir. That was, I suppose, partly because I always had lived so much in the present moment ; but it was partly also because I had forced myself of late to turn away from the recollection of Roger, and to think of life for a time without him. If I had done otherwise, I should have been too unhappy to attend to my daily duties. The trials of life are, I believe, after all, very much what we choose to make them. It was a kind of instinct with me to take every one as it came, and twist and turn it till I saw it in the point of view which made it most bearable. I have sometimes fancied that untoward events are like those curious padlocks formed of rings of brass, with separate letters engraven upon them ; when the rings are all turned properly, so that the letters form a certain word, the key goes through easily ; but till this is done, one may try for ever and not be able to unfasten the padlock. Perhaps the word which all human trials are intended to form is Faith, for by that alone the mysteries of God's Providence are unlocked.

At any rate, I know that I could never go on fretting about anything, however painful ; and, when once I had made up my mind that Roger and I were to be parted for a year, I said to myself, 'It is God's will for some good purpose, to take from me for a while the greatest happiness I have ; but He has left me a good many blessings still, and so, instead of grieving over what I can't have, I will make the best of what I have.'

I don't mean to say, however, that I could do this all at once. Many and many a struggle did I go through with the yearning for the old times, or the dread of the new ones ; and even that afternoon as I drove away from Compton Heath, and drew near to Sandcombe, all the slumbering anxieties and sorrows seemed to rouse themselves up to depress me.

In a future state of existence, it will, no doubt, be very pleasant to go from one star to another, and see what the different inhabi-

tants are like. Where there is no sin there will be no sorrow. But in this evil world, where a sudden change in a home often means only a turning from troubles of one kind to those of another, such a move comes to one with a kind of shock.

The cart drove into the yard, and there I saw Roger and William standing together. I jumped out before the man could help me, and ran up to them.

: 'What, Ursie! How d'ye do?' said William, good-naturedly. 'You are rather late, aren't you?'

Roger kissed me very hard on both cheeks, but said nothing. They went on talking about some alteration in the farm. Leah was gone in the chase to Hatton, and was not returned; so I went up-stairs to my room, and unpacked my boxes, and put my things away in the drawers. Stupidly enough, I had forgotten that I should not be at Sandcombe in time for tea; and now I should have to wait for supper, unless William thought of offering me anything. I dare say people would call that very strange and silly, and inquire why I did not ask for some tea in my brother's house; and I can give no reason, except that anything which put the Sandcombe household out of its regular way of going on was a trouble. You might ask and have, but you were certain to be reminded of it afterwards; and if Leah had come home and found me at tea, she would have been sure to say in the course of the evening that something or another was left undone, because Martha had been obliged to get Ursie's tea; and this though I had put on the kettle, and cut the bread and butter for myself.

Putting my things away took a long time; after that I thought I would sit down and read a chapter in the Bible, which would make me feel more homelike and natural than anything else; but I had no time, for Roger knocked at my door, and, of course, I was only too glad to bid him come in and hear all he had to say.

He was in excellent spirits, seeing everything so hopefully, that he made me hopeful too. Mr Richardson's friend had smoothed the way for him, and his good character had gone before him. He had received an offer which would make all easy. It was proposed to him to accompany a gentleman, named Pierce, who was going out to Canada on his own account; he was to stay with him for six months at least, and help him in his first setting off, and thus he would have time to look about him, and decide as to whether he should finally settle

in the country. This plan satisfied William, because it did not require such an outlay of money at the present time, and Roger was quite willing to take things quietly, and not be an independent man all at once; he had managed the greater part of his business, and the little that remained was to be done by John Hervey, who was forced to go up to London the next week. The ship was to sail in about a fortnight's time. For myself, I confess the idea that his plans were only settled for six months was a great relief. At the end of that time something might happen to bring him back,—who knew? At any rate, the definite time was a limit beyond which I felt I was not permitted to look.

We talked on so long about Canada that I did not think of putting in a word about Mrs Weir, but Roger was very unlike most people in one respect. Instead of conversing as so many do only about what interests themselves, and because others listen and appear interested, fancying they have been very kind and agreeable, and never asking a question or giving a thought in return, Roger gave what he took, and because I liked to hear what he had been doing, he liked to hear what I had been doing.

'Now, Trot,' he said, when there was a pause, 'you have had my say, let me have yours. How has the world gone with you?'

'Pretty well,' I said, 'but I don't think, Roger, the world misses me much. Mrs Weir has taken up with her niece, and so she could well spare me.'

'If it's Mrs Temple you mean,' he replied, 'Mrs Weir won't be friends with her long; at least, if what John Hervey says is true.'

'Mrs Weir is easily imposed upon,' I said, 'and Mrs Temple can talk good, and I can't. Besides, she is a lady, and her relation: only I should like to think that all the things I am sure will be said of me behind my back would not be believed.'

'You will be in Canada with me, Trot, soon, and then we shan't either of us care what any one says of us.'

I knew that I should care. If I were to go to Canada, or to the other side of the globe, and to feel certain of never setting foot in England again, I should care. But Roger's thought just then was that Canada was a cure for all evils.

'I am thankful you are staying here, Ursie,' he continued; 'it is best to be with relations. After all, they are more to be depended on, and William talks very kindly about you.'

'Yes,' I said, 'but perhaps it is more safe to reckon upon myself for comfort than upon William or any one. That is not wrong, I hope, Roger.'

He looked grave. 'It now and then strikes me, Ursie, that you have something to learn in this world,' he said. 'But so we all have for that matter. And you are a brave girl.'

'You mean, I trust to myself,' I said; 'but whom have I else to trust to, Roger? Putting aside religion, I mean.'

'No, you will make your way anyhow.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'Nothing, Trot, nothing. That's Leah's voice, isn't it? and whom has she with her?'

I knew, for I had seen the chaise drive up with Leah and Jessie Lee.

Roger opened the door and listened. 'She has brought back little Jessie,' he said, thoughtfully. 'I was going to say something to you about her. I'm glad she is come.'

'It is more than I am,' I replied, 'I wanted to have you all to myself, and now I must go and talk to her.'

Roger and I went out into the passage together.

Leah and Jessie were talking at the foot of the stairs, and the next minute Jessie's light step was heard as she ran up two stairs at a time. She pushed against Roger, by an accident, when she reached the top, and stumbled. When she saw him she burst into one of her pretty, merry laughs. 'O Mr Roger!' she said, 'you frightened me. I thought you were a giant.'

'I never meant to frighten you,' he said, 'but you are so giddy, Jessie. You run without thinking where you are going.'

'Very likely,' she replied, 'I know it is always my own fault, whatever happens. But, Mr Roger,' and she looked up at him with a pleasant smile, 'what business have you here?'

'Ursie!' called out Leah, several times, from the foot of the stairs. Her voice sounded to me like the croaking of a raven; it quite drowned what Roger was saying.

'I am here,' I said; 'do you want me?'

'Oh! I was coming up; but I'm so tired. Just let Jessie put her bonnet and shawl in your room, will you? Have you settled yourself? Supper's nearly ready.'

I was heartily glad to hear it, for I was very hungry. 'You will go down and speak to Leah, won't you?' said Roger; and he stood rather aside for me to pass.

I did not feel in the least inclined, but I saw he wished it, so

I just kissed Jessie, and told her to go into my room, and down stairs I went

'I was sorry to be out when you came, Ursie,' said Leah, as she threw aside a handsome silk cloak, which she always wrapped round her when she went in the chaise, 'but I was obliged to see about our new washerwoman; I don't want to be washing more than once in six weeks, now you are come, and I can put things in better order.'

'Oh!' I replied. I don't know how it was, but I felt so unwilling to be mixed up as one with Leah in her household concerns.

'Jessie is to sleep here to-night,' said Leah. 'I told her I was sure she could have part of your bed, if the spare attic wasn't ready, and I don't think it is; and, besides, it is not worth while to have the bed in the attic made up just for one night.'

'Supper, my good woman! Supper!' William came out of the parlour and clapped Leah on the shoulder.

She gathered up her cloak. 'Ursie, if you don't mind, you can just take this up-stairs. I shall go and see about supper.'

'And come down directly,' said William to me; 'don't stay gossiping with Jessie. I am as hungry as a hunter.'

Up-stairs I went again. Jessie had not moved from her place, nor Roger from his. Jessie looked ashamed of herself. I thought they must have touched upon some serious matter, for I heard Jessie say, 'I can't be always working and thinking like Ursie, Mr Roger, to please any one.' She spoke a little pettishly, and not quite so simply as was her wont. Roger had a very kind smile upon his face. He always seemed to look upon Jessie as a spoiled child, and he said, 'You know, Jessie, it is not for me to find fault, only I disliked to hear it said, and so, as I was going away for so long, I thought I would e'en tell you myself.'

Jessie looked so put out as she followed me into my room, that I could not help asking her what was the matter. She avoided answering at first. 'It was nothing,' she said; 'people were very cross; they had no right to say such things, and Mr Roger was very unkind to believe them.'

'Then there is something,' I replied. 'You had better tell me, Jessie, and if Roger is wrong, I can put him right.'

'It was not half as bad as he declared,' she exclaimed; 'the girls in Hove do much worse, and that he knows, and you know too.'

'I don't know,' I said, 'for you have not told me what you did.'

'Miss Shaw and Captain Price were there,' continued Jessie, tossing her head pettishly; 'and if they saw nothing wrong, I don't see what business other folks have to find fault.'

'But what is it? what is it?' I felt provoked with her, though I tried not to show it.

'It is Mr John Hervey's tale, I am certain,' exclaimed Jessie 'He is always spying.'

'Really, Jessie,' I replied, 'I can't stand here all night in this senseless way; if you don't choose to explain, I must needs leave you and go down to supper.'

Jessie was very much inclined to cry, but when she saw that, instead of attending to her, I was going towards the door, she pulled me back: 'Miss Shaw and Captain Price were in the shop,' she said, 'and the two officers were their friends, and I only talked and laughed a little. Miss Shaw talked a great deal the loudest.'

'The old complaint!' I said rather shortly. 'Jane Shaw will make herself noticed wherever she goes, and if you will go about with her, Jessie, you must expect the same. Was that all Roger had to say?'

'He told me that Mrs Deer, the stationer's wife, had talked to him about it, and said that if I didn't take care I should get myself a bad name. But Mrs Deer is envious of Jane Shaw, that I know. Jane told me so herself. Hetty Deer was at the race ball, and Captain Price danced with her, and so Mrs Deer thought there was a chance for her, and now she is disappointed.'

'That may or mayn't be, Jessie,' I replied. 'One thing is quite clear, that Roger has heard your name mentioned in a way he doesn't like, and being an old friend, he did quite right to tell you of it; and if you will take my advice, you will give heed to the warning, and not go into Hove again with Jane Shaw, or any of her set. You know, Jessie, because you are left so much to yourself, there is the more reason for you to be careful.'

Jessie's little fit of temper was over when she had given it vent. She still held my gown, and said, 'Don't go, Ursie; I am very unhappy, and Mr Roger thinks so ill of me.'

'No, indeed!' I exclaimed. 'It is not in Roger's way to think ill of any person, much less of one he has known like you, Jessie, from a baby. But no doubt he is very particular as to

the ways of those he is interested in, and that may make him speak out more strongly than seems quite kind.'

'I do mean to be careful,' sobbed Jessie; 'you know, Ursie, I never go on in that fashion when I am with you; and I want to be steady, indeed I do; and I only went to Hove with Miss Shaw because she begged so hard, and I thought it was the only chance I might have of seeing about a dress for the wedding.'

'If you girls don't come down to supper, there will be none for you,' cried out William, from the passage below. Jessie washed her face, and dried her eyes, and went to the glass to smooth her hair, staying longer than I thought necessary; so I left her there and went down alone.

Roger just looked up from his plate, when I entered, and not seeing Jessie, ate his supper in silence. I could discover from his troubled face that it had cost him a good deal to say what might have seemed an unkind word to the poor little motherless thing, but she quite needed it.

I forget exactly what passed at supper-time. I know it was a great effort to me to talk to Leah, and that Roger scarcely spoke, and Jessie looked as shy as a frightened bird. We were not any of us natural, but we did not understand each other, and so how could we be natural?

There was never much time between supper and going to bed, but I longed to have Roger alone, and find out what was really the matter about Jessie; and it happened that I had the opportunity, for Leah took advantage of having Jessie there to send the maid to bed early, and she and Jessie carried away the supper things, and then stayed some time talking in the kitchen, and William went away too; and so Roger and I were left to ourselves.

Roger entered upon the subject directly: 'Jessie told you what I said to her, Trot,' he began.

'Yes; she told me in her way, which is no way, at least as far as understanding goes. I could make neither head nor tail of it. Why didn't you speak to me first, Roger?'

He laughed. 'Put a woman to scold a woman! you would know better than that, Ursie, if you were a man.'

'But what was the mischief?' I asked.

'No mischief,' he answered, with a flash in his eye, as though he were angry with the word. But Hove people are not very careful of what they say and Jessie doesn't think. Mrs Deer

heard a great noise, laughing and talking, in Hale's shop. Jane Shaw, and Captain Price, and a party of officers, were there having luncheon. Jessie was there too. Mrs Deer said she made more noise than any, and that people stopped as they went by to listen, and that some one had heard one of the officers call her Jessie, and that she laughed and seemed to like it. I don't believe that; but anyhow it was not what I liked to hear; and it's no use saying anything to old Mrs Morris, and less talking to Leah, and so I thought that perhaps Jessie wouldn't take it amiss from an old friend, if I gave her a word of warning myself. You know, Ursie, I am going away, and not likely to see her again. But I dare say I was wrong, women don't like being talked to.'

'Whether they like it or not, they must bear it, if they need it,' I replied. 'But I don't think, Roger, you were quite the person to speak.'

'Likely enough; but'—he stopped a moment, 'it was so on my mind, it came out almost before I was aware, and now, I suppose, she won't forgive or forget.'

'Don't fear that,' I said; 'she is only a silly child, and quite accustomed to be scolded.'

He shut up suddenly; all his answer was, 'Well! it can't be helped,' and then he took a candle to go to bed.

I had felt cross when Leah first proposed that Jessie should sleep in my room. It was taking things for granted in a way I did not like; but, as it happened, I was glad of it afterwards, for it gave me the opportunity of a little more talk with Jessie. There is no time like night for a free conversation. Jessie and I said little to each other as we were undressing, but when the candle was out I took courage, and told her what had passed between me and Roger, and how he was afraid she was angry and would not forgive; but, I added, that, for my part, I could not see what cause he had to ask for forgiveness. I felt he had acted like a true friend, though, perhaps, he might have been a little sudden in his way of introducing the subject; and then I went on to give her some more cautions for the future, telling her how specially needful it was for girls, left as we were, never to give occasion for an unkind word. 'Roger would stand by you, Jessie,' I said, 'through thick and thin, and so would I; but you won't find many to do it, especially amongst the persons whose company you think so much of now.'

She caught up my words quickly, and answered that she knew

I had a bad opinion of the Shaws ; but I knew nothing of them, and no one had ever been able to find any real harm in them.

'As to real harm,' I replied, 'it would be dreadful indeed if things were to come to that pass. But that is looking at matters only as men and women look at them. There may be many things that we count trifles, which yet are real harm in the sight of God.'

'You have lived so much with set-up ladies and grand people,' said Jessie, 'that you are over particular, Ursie. How can a merry girl like me be expected to sail about stiffly, and never speak above a whisper?'

'You turn off so, Jessie,' I replied, 'but you know quite well what I mean. It is not the laughing and talking in proper places, and with proper people, that any one finds fault with. But Captain Price's gay friends are not your friends ; they are not in your station, and there is the danger. When people are all equal, they can have little friendly jokes, and no harm may come of it. But what would be very kind in Roger, or William, or John Hervey, would be a liberty in one of Captain Price's idle set ; and, Jessie, Mrs Weir once said to me, and I wish to my heart you could remember it, that the mere fact of being a woman gives one a claim to respect ; that it is a kind of natural rank which even the beggar-girl in the street possesses, as long as she conducts herself modestly and decently ; and she told me that the least freedom of manner from a person above my own position, let him be gentleman, or nobleman, or prince even, would be a disrespect which I ought never to allow.'

'I can't help allowing it,' said Jessie. 'They laugh, and say droll things, and then I can't help laughing in return.'

'Which shows that it would be much better for you not to mix with them,' I said.

'But I don't see,' persisted Jessie. 'There is Jane Shaw, she is not above you or me, naturally, but she has been a good deal with Captain Price, and now she is going to marry him. Where is the harm?'

'Captain Price is no real gentleman, Jessie ; you must own that,' I replied. 'Put him by the side of Mr Stewart, of Hatton, and you see the difference directly.'

'But he was born a gentleman !'

'That may be ; but his habits and ways are not those of a gentleman, nor of an honest farmer neither. He is not looked up to by any one, and that is the reason, so far as I can see, why

he is going to marry a woman like Jane Shaw, who is much in the same plight. If Captain Price had respected her, he would have known well enough that he had no chance with her. An offer from such a man is no honour, but the contrary. And as to being intimate with him or his friends, why there is not one of Captain Price's set that I would ever speak to again if he called me by my Christian name; and I have heard, Jessie, that you only laugh and look pleased.'

She was silent, and turned away from me, and I heard she was sobbing. Presently she said, 'Did Mr Roger tell you that?'

'He told me he had heard it, but he didn't believe it.'

'It was true,' said Jessie; 'I didn't think about it at the time.'

'But you will think about it now,' I said. 'Jessie, why do you call Roger Mr Roger? You have known him a pretty long time.'

She quite started up. 'I could not call him anything else, he is so good.'

'You respect him,' I said; 'and so you can't take liberties with him. What respect could Captain Price's friend feel for you, Jessie, when, having only seen you a few times before, he ventured to speak to you more freely than you speak to Roger, whom you have known all your life?'

She threw her arms round me, and kissed me, and thanked me, and I felt how impossible it was not to love her; and then she begged me to tell Roger that she was dreadfully sorry, and it never should happen again; only would he please not say anything more about it to her. And again turning from me, she fell asleep as quickly as a child.

CHAPTER XXVII.

I AM going to hurry over the parting with Roger. I seem to have been telling of nothing but partings lately, and moreover, to speak strictly, there was no parting. At the time I felt this bitterly, but on looking back I see that it was all for the best, and that I was saved a great deal. The fortnight before Roger went was a very unsettled one for us all;

so much so, that at last, though every moment with him was indescribably precious, I began to wish that it was all over. Leah, I knew, was impatient; indeed she did not attempt to conceal it. Everything was put aside to be done when Roger was gone, for William and he had so much to talk about and arrange, that there was no time to be given to anything else. Then there were perpetual interruptions from visitors; Farmer Kemp, and John Hervey, and Mr Shaw, and Mr Richardson, and even Mr Stewart, of Hatton, coming over to Sandcombe upon business or from kindness. It was strange to find what an interest every one took in Roger. I had not the least notion before, how much he was respected; but I don't think there is anything that makes its way amongst country people like steady work and honesty. It is better, even for this world, than great success, which is thought so much of in town and manufacturing districts. I did feel proud of Roger, as I watched him, with his fine, manly face, and straightforward, yet respectful manner, standing talking to Mr Stewart, and giving his opinions like a man who knows that his words are of value, because they come from a true heart, and a single eye, and a reverence for the laws of God and man. I heard Mr Stewart say one day to William, that he never knew before what they were all going to lose in Roger, and he couldn't help wishing that something had been thought of to keep him in England. But it was too late; time went on faster than I could well bear to think, and at last there came the day before what I thought was to be the last parting. I scarcely saw Roger that morning, for he went over to Hatton to say good-bye to Mrs Morris and Jessie. He and Jessie were excellent friends again,—all the more so for the little breeze. Nothing had been said about it by either of them, but the few times that Jessie came to Sandcombe whilst Roger was there, I remarked that he talked more to her than he had ever done, whilst she on her part seemed to lean to his opinion in all matters.

It sometimes seemed to me a pity, that he should be going away, just when he was gaining an influence over her for good; and yet I knew that it was little enough he could do for her. A girl of her age could not be guided by a man of Roger's age. If any one could do her real good, it would be myself. I thought of this still more when Roger came back from Hatton. He had dined there, and was going then to Longside; and he might, he said, be obliged to drive into Hove; but he hoped not, as it would take up so much time. He had walked to Hatton, but

intended to ride to Longside; and while his horse was being saddled, he made me come out with him into the garden; and we walked up and down, and had a long conversation, and all the time about Jessie, for she weighed a good deal upon my mind. He said that she had come out more in this last meeting, I suppose the fact of his going away made her feel quite at ease. She had told him that there was no one to look after her; and that she longed to have some person to cling to, who might guard her.

‘She did not ask you to take her with you to Canada, did she?’ I said laughing.

He drew back his arm from me, as though I had struck him with a dagger. ‘I don’t like those jokes, Ursie,’ he said. ‘If you will only keep Jessie from the Shaws, she will soon find a good husband without going to Canada to look for one.’ He was quite silent for some moments after that; and I was vexed, though I had spoken innocently enough, knowing it was all nonsense. He said a little more about William and Leah, and bade me stay with them under all trials. ‘You are too young, Ursie,’ he said, ‘to cut the cable and set sail by yourself. Trust to me, and if God should be pleased to give me health and strength, we will have a home together again before many months are over; and if not’—he stopped short in his walk, and laid his hand upon my shoulder—‘Trot, little one, we must put relations first, because God puts them first. God will help you whatever comes.’

Those seem to me the last words I heard him speak; for they are the last which rested on my mind. He rode off to Longside, and on his way met John Hervey, who took him on to Hove. Things were to be done there which he found would keep him till very late at night; and he was obliged to be up very early the next morning, to be in time for the London coach. Farmer Kemp came over to tell us this, and brought a hasty note from Roger, saying that he and John had settled that they must sleep in Hove; and to beg that all he had left might be sent in the very first thing in the morning. Roger’s hand shook, I am sure, when he wrote that note; and there was just at the end ‘Cheer up and trust; God bless you;’ that was all. He had not a moment to spare, Farmer Kemp said. I remember I stood quite still in the middle of the room, and did not speak a word, till Farmer Kemp came up to me and whispered, ‘Courage, lassie;’ and then quite quietly, for I could not bear to let any one see

what I felt, I answered, 'The things are very nearly ready; I will go and see about them;' and up-stairs I went.

Not one tear did I shed till I found myself in bed at twelve o'clock. It took me till then before all was ready; and oh! how I longed all the time for a kind word and look. But William was vexed that Roger had not thought of the plan before; and Leah was sadly put out because I was obliged to keep the maid up when she would not help me herself; so they neither of them gave me much comfort. So lonely, so very lonely I felt, when I lay down in my bed,—no words can describe it. I had a short night, scarcely to be called rest, and was up at half-past four again, to finish the last box. At half-past five I watched the cart drive out of the yard; and then I went back to my room again, and instead of crying, I knelt down and said all my troubles out to God, and that made me better.

The day after Roger went I thought of going over to see Mrs Weir. It must have looked unkind not to have done so before, but it was impossible. I was afraid Mrs Weir would not understand this. People who are at leisure so little know what the difficulties of busy people are. Even now it was not very easy to find time for the walk; for I had a dress to make for Mrs Richardson, which had been put aside for Roger's work; and I had no means of gaining any extra hours, as Leah was inclined to seize upon every moment to which she had the slightest claim, and, indeed, upon some on which she had no claim. I had foreseen this from the beginning, and resolved to have, if possible, a clear understanding with her about it. I took the opportunity, when William was smoking his pipe after dinner, and she was dawdling about, before setting to work for the afternoon.

'Leah,' I said, 'I thought of walking over to the Heath this afternoon; and perhaps I might have a cup of tea there: so you needn't wait for me.'

'It is early days to be going, isn't it?' she said; 'and I thought you wanted to sit quiet in the afternoon, and do your work.'

'I should be back by half-past six,' I said, 'and I might work between that and supper, and besides at odd times to-morrow, and so make up. Mrs Weir will think it strange if I don't go.'

'There is house needlework to be done between tea and supper,' replied Leah; 'and as to odd times, I don't see where they are to come from.'

'I might manage half-an-hour before breakfast, perhaps,' I said.

Leah looked black. 'You will scarcely do needlework, and get breakfast, too,' she said.

'I was not thinking of helping to get breakfast,' I answered. 'I thought, Leah, you always did that yourself.'

'I have done it since Jessie-went,' she replied; 'but I can't go on with it. There are so many things to be seen to at night, I must have more rest in the morning. And as for Martha, it is useless to look to her; she has to light the fires, and boil the milk for the men. There is the dairy, too. I reckoned upon your attending to that, Ursie. Some one must have an eye to it early; and then Martha can clean the milkpans, and put it in order, whilst we are having our breakfasts.'

All very true; only the breakfast was Leah's own duty.

'Don't you see?' inquired Leah.

'Yes, I see,' was my reply. 'But, Leah, if I take to all this in the morning, you must please spare me an hour to make up in the evening. I don't mean when there is a press, but generally.'

'We can see: we'll talk about that,' she replied. 'It's best to go on gradually. No one can mark out a day as you would have it done, Ursie.'

'And I suppose you would like to have the poultry fed the first thing after breakfast,' I said. 'Jessie used to do that, I know.'

'I don't care about the poultry,' she replied, 'I have taken to them myself, and I think it is better. But there's the meat in the larder to be changed, and you could help Martha clean the dishes; and then there is the cooking.'

'I am not a good hand at cooking for so many,' I said; 'I suppose I shall have the girl to help?'

'That is as may be. We shall see if she is wanted. After all, there's not so much to be done. Bacon and cabbage are easily boiled for the men, and the maids eat after us.'

'You give the men fresh meat sometimes in the week, don't you?' I asked.

'Well! we used. But I find they do just as well without it. And these aren't times when we can afford to have fancies. William is rather particular about his own dinners, Ursie; and I dare say, having been so much with Mrs Mason, you have learned some things that may please him.'

'You will want a pudding, I suppose, for the men?' I said,

'Why, yes, to be sure ;—it saves bacon. Apples are coming in, but they are scarce this year, and I would have them kept for William. Anything does for the men. They eat suet pudding as often as not ; and baked rice and milk, with a sprinkling of sugar,—not eggs, of course. By the by, Ursie, the day after to-morrow is baking day, and then William looks to having some fruit tarts made ; and he complained last week that there weren't sweet cakes enough. He is like a child in being fond of sweet things.'

'The cooking and baking both will be more, I am afraid, than I shall be able to undertake, Leah,' I said, 'considering that I have needlework of my own to do besides.'

'It is only one day in the week,' she replied, 'and Jessie always took the greatest part upon herself.'

'Because she has nothing else to do,' I replied. 'What I can put into the morning, I will ; but I would not have you look to me for more than that, please ; for, indeed, I don't think I shall be able to manage it.'

'We shall see ; we can't settle beforehand ; only I thought, Ursie, you were come to make yourself useful.'

I did not know what to answer, being sure that, whatever I said, she would take my words as a kind of promise.

'And there's washing, too,' she continued, in an undertone.

'And help for that,' I said, boldly.

'Yes,—some.' Leah spoke doubtfully. 'Mrs Hobson won't come, since Kitty has been turned away, and the Hatton woman, whom I've engaged, won't be enough.'

'But there are Martha and the girl,' I said.

'Yes, but if they are washing, who is to take their work ?'

'Really, Leah,' I said, 'if you mean that I am to do it, I don't see how it is possible. There will be cooking on washing-days, just as on any other, in the morning, and a great deal more fuss in the house. If you help yourself, or have some one else to help, we may do very well ; but all the willing horses in England won't be able to draw a waggon if it is loaded too heavily.'

'It will only come once in six weeks,' she said ; 'I have made up my mind to that.'

'And the work will be all the more heavy,' I replied. 'If you would have it once a month, and get proper help, Leah, I am sure you would find it better.'

'I think, Ursie, you had best leave me to manage my own affairs,' was the reply I had from her; and she went off without giving me any more definite notion of my work, or any better idea of how it was all to be managed.

It was not hopeful, certainly. My thoughts turned back to Roger and my happy home at Dene, with no one to interfere with me; all my duties regular and orderly, and Roger always pleased with me. I did not see how I could get on as things were; but still less did I see how God, by these little trials, was teaching and training me.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOR I had great faults. They are clear to me now. At that time I almost thought they were virtues. Left so early as I was without a mother to search minutely into the defects of my natural character, perhaps it is not surprising that they were hidden from me; although I can with truth say, that, in the main, my heart's desire was to serve God and do my duty conscientiously.

Wilful and hasty I had no doubt that I was; I had been punished for these faults continually, and Roger had again and again corrected me for them. Some people, too, said I was self-trusting and conceited; but my conscience, on a surface examination, in a measure, acquitted me. If persons were set over me whom I respected, I could obey, and be glad to do so. I knew this, and it satisfied me, and I looked no deeper. I did not see that there was at the bottom of my heart a love of rule and independence, even underneath my apparent submission. I could not give up my own will, merely because it was ordered by God's providence that I should do so. I dearly loved to feel myself my own mistress, and wherever I was placed, I was inclined to criticise and find fault with any person who claimed authority over me; and all this did not appear to me wrong. I had but one desire—that things should be done in the right way. I forgot that it was necessary also that they should be done by the right person.

And so again as regarded independence of character, the wish to provide for myself, and make my own way in the world.

These were dispositions in which I saw no harm and suspected no danger. They had worked well hitherto. They had, I knew, been a great assistance to Roger, and very much lessened his anxiety in parting with me. They had given me a position in Mrs Weir's household, and enabled me to be of far greater use to her than I could have been if I had merely done as I was told, without offering an opinion, or showing that I was able to work out my own path. I could not help feeling that I had gained a standing for myself in the world, even beyond my age, and it seemed to me that I had nothing to do but to go on as I had begun, and all must be well. For several years past, day by day, insensibly to myself, my self-dependence had increased. If I had continued with Mrs Weir, gaining influence over her and her household, it must have gone on increasing, and who can say what the end might have been?

We are often warned against our besetting sin. I am not at all sure whether we do not need a much stronger warning against our besetting characteristic. One thing I am sure of, that the inconsistencies and weaknesses which I have marked in some of the best persons I have ever known, have arisen from some tendency in the natural disposition, in itself innocent, but which altered the right balance of the character. Too much hope, or too little, too great excitability, too great rapidity in forming opinions, too great fear of giving pain, too much caution; many such peculiarities there are, which are no doubt necessary as forming the particular features of every individual character, and yet which require in each case especially to be watched and guarded against.

In my own case I knew that I had a great love of independence; when it became wilfulness I was scolded and punished for it. Yet it was only because it was wilfulness; no one would have thought of punishing me for liking independence. It would have been very unjust and unfair to do so; but then no one thought of whispering in my ear:—'Take care that your love of independence does not become a fault by blinding your eyes to duty.'

It may be said that religion ought to have set all that right, and so no doubt it ought; but how few become thoroughly religious at once. We may think ourselves converted because we have gone through a certain state of sorrow and repentance, and no doubt such feelings are very often the beginning of a holy life, but they are by no means the end. Religion must, I

imagine, be with us all a matter of growth ; and as to myself I do not remember that I ever had any of those seasons of excited feelings which I know that many pass through. Times there were, indeed, when I was more penitent, or more earnest, or thankful, but it was all in a quiet way—Roger's way—in which there was very little talking about feelings.

In some respects I dare say this was a snare to me, for there are dangers wherever one turns. I was likely to go to sleep over my duties, or do them in a slovenly manner, and this would naturally hide from me many of the lesser evils of my character. It is only when we are heartily zealous in our wish to please God, that we search deeply into the secret corners of our hearts, and through His grace are enabled to discover and root out the weaknesses and infirmities as well as the sins which lie hidden there. My life had hitherto been too peaceful to reveal to me the necessity of such an examination. Where there was little contradiction there was little to struggle against, and though by no means well satisfied with myself, I certainly had much to learn as to my own deficiencies. And at that time religion with me was more a matter of duty than of love. I can now see, through God's mercy, that duty is but a stepping-stone, one without which we can never reach the point at which we should aim, but which cannot by itself raise us to the height from which heaven will be always in our view. Sorrow and disappointment in this world had their work to do in me before I could be brought to feel that the religion for which God has created us is not merely a law of obedience but a spring of happiness,—happiness in the consciousness of that deep, satisfying, grateful love which makes the heaviest trial and the most self-denying discipline a joy, when submitted to for Christ's sake.

I say this of myself, because I feel that to many my feelings of religion, at the time of which I am writing, may appear unsatisfactory. They were so, I grant. They were unfolding, but as yet they were only in the bud. All I will venture to say of them is, that I believe they were of the right kind. There was a deep perception of my own unworthiness, a hearty wish to serve God, a watchfulness against all the faults of which I was aware, a spirit of thankfulness for my daily blessings, and I hope some perception of the infinite love shown to us all in our Redemption. I speak of this latter feeling doubtfully, because it seems to me now that it is one which persons are often slow in attaining, especially when, as in my case, the growth of religion has been

unaccompanied by great fears or an overpowering sense of sin, and consequent relief in the consciousness of pardon. If I can judge at all of myself, I see my own sinfulness now much more fully than I did then, and so I hope I am more penitent and more thankful; and yet I can scarcely say that I am more in earnest.

I walked over to the Heath in a very unhappy state of mind: lonely,—I could not be otherwise, when I thought of the long separation from Roger,—and fretted and perplexed as to my present duties; how far I was bound to give in to Leah in consideration of her being William's wife, and that he was giving me a home; and how far I was called upon to stand up for my own right, and the agreement which had been made as to my time before Roger went away. But as I drew near the Heath, other thoughts forced themselves upon me. I met Mr Temple as I was going along the side of St Anne's Hill. He was coming up from the cottage, and had moved a hurdle which was in his way, and as I drew near he kept it open for me. He was a civil little gentleman, and I liked as well as pitied him, so I thanked him very heartily.

'You are going down to the cottage, I suppose,' he said.

'Yes, sir,' I replied. 'I hope I shall find Mrs Weir pretty well.'

'I have not seen her to-day,' he said. 'There have been visitors, and she has not been down-stairs.'

'More visitors!' I thought to myself. 'They will kill poor Mrs Weir between them soon.'

'A little pleasant society does her good, I think,' continued Mr Temple. 'She has been much better since my wife and I came.'

'She is getting over her trouble a little, I hope, sir,' I said, for I did not like to agree with him, though there was some truth in his words.

'I think, if we could find a house to suit us, we might remain here some time longer,' observed Mr Temple. He looked at me askance; he never seemed to have courage to look any one in the face. I made no reply, and he went on, 'The climate suits Mrs Temple so well, and we were just thinking of giving up our house in the north. Do you know how many bedrooms there are in that house on the lower road—"Stonecliff," I think, they call it?'

'No, sir, I don't,' I replied, and I made a movement to go on;

but Mr Temple was determined to have his talk out. I believe he always kept what he had to say till he found some one to expend it upon, when he was out of his wife's sight.

'Mr Richardson says it is cold in the winter,' he observed; 'did you ever hear that it was considered so? You must know this part of the country well, for you have lived here all your life.'

'The houses at Compton are all new, sir,' I answered; 'I don't know much about them; but it must be very cold for a delicate person like Mrs Temple. The wind cuts round the corner of the cliff, and she would find the roar of the sea troublesome.'

'I don't think she minds that,' he said; 'it is a good house, I believe, and—but, however, I won't keep you; if you see Mrs Temple, tell her I have walked over to Dene.'

I suspect a fit of caution and fear of his wife came over him at the moment, and stopped his communicativeness, for he rushed away, not waiting to put the burdle back, and I watched him climbing the hill by the help of his walking-stick, and then continued my walk.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A THORN had been planted in my mind, a very large one, though not so large as it might have been if I had been living with Mrs Weir. I only half believed what Mr Temple said, for he was a very blundering man, and Mrs Temple was just as likely as not to have put the notion into his head, only for the sake of employing him. She was always planning something for him, and as soon as it was settled, undoing it again. But if there were any truth in it, it would be ill news indeed, as far as I was concerned; and even as regarded Mrs Weir, I had a great dislike to the notion of her being taken in by any one, even though it made her happy for the time. I have always so dearly loved the truth in all things, and would rather know it and face it, both in persons and circumstances, however unpleasant it may be, than live in the pleasantest dream that could be granted me. But I don't think this was quite Mrs Weir's case; a little dreaminess and imagination were necessary to her.

Before I reached the house, I saw the visitors who had been mentioned; they were Mr and Mrs Richardson, and they, and Mrs Temple, and Miss Milicent were standing together in the sweep. I think Mr and Mrs Richardson were just going after paying their visit. I tried to make my way to the back door without being noticed, but Mr Richardson saw and came after me to inquire for Roger, and then Miss Milicent followed.

'So, it's you at last, Ursie,' she said. 'I made sure you had quite forgotten us; and there has been my mother fidgeting to see you every day. You knocked down one of the little ivory chessmen when you took out those nick-nack follies the other day.'

'Did I, Miss Milicent?' I exclaimed, very much surprised and vexed, and not at all recollecting at the moment on what occasion I had meddled with them.

'And Matilda Temple was to have had them for the charity bazaar, but they are no good now,' continued Miss Milicent, 'Not that I care much for that,' she added, laughing, and speaking to Mr Richardson. 'Charity bazaars are not much in my way. Are they in yours?'

He looked grave, and said he did not mind having things made privately and sold for charity, because many persons could give work and time who could not give money; but he did dislike turning what was called charity into an amusement, and having tents, and music, and young ladies to sell the things at absurd prices, and in fact making it just as much a worldly entertainment as a ball or a play. It was as much as to say that people would not give their money without having a return. There was a verse in the Bible which always came to his mind when he heard of bazaars.

He paused a moment, and when Miss Milicent insisted upon hearing it, he quoted David's speech to Araunah, the Jebusite: 'Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.'

Mrs Temple came up just as Mr Richardson was speaking, and I was afraid there would be a long discussion. I felt a little awkward and out of my place, but I did not like to move away, not knowing where exactly to go. I was relieved when Mrs Richardson joined us, and interrupted the conversation by addressing me. I think she felt, like myself, that an argument with Mrs Temple might be disagreeable.

'Ursula,' she said, 'I am really glad to see you. I think

you may help Miss Weir and me in something we have been planning.'

'Oh yes, Ursie can help better than any one,' said Miss Milicent; 'and she will take a girl at Sandcombe, I am sure. I think, Mrs Richardson, we might as well let her have Esther Smithson; she is the most troublesome girl in the school.'

'I should be very happy to assist in any good work,' began Mrs Temple, coming forward, and rather pushing herself before me.

'Thank you,' said Mrs Richardson; 'but this is a business which only concerns parishioners. Happily, Sandcombe is in Compton parish, so that Ursula still belongs to us.'

'Your dear mother will be wanting me, Milicent, I am afraid,' said Mrs Temple, in a whining voice, which she always adopted when speaking of Mrs Weir. 'Mrs Richardson, I am afraid I must leave you.'

She was very short in her manner, and I saw she was displeased. I don't know whether Mrs Richardson remarked it, but I am sure we all breathed more freely when she was gone.

'Could you walk down the road with us a little way, Ursula?' said Mr Richardson. 'I am afraid we must be going, for I have an engagement at home in half an hour.'

'Ursula will be tired,' remarked Mrs Richardson, who never forgot to be thoughtful.

If I had been tired I should have gone with them, they were always so pleasant and kind; but, as it happened, I really was not tired, the air on the hill had been so refreshing.

Miss Milicent followed without being asked.

'What we were talking of, Ursula,' said Mrs Richardson, 'was the school.'

'The Sunday-school, ma'am?' I inquired. 'I am afraid I should scarcely be able to walk over from Sandcombe as I used to do from Dene.'

'Not the Sunday-school, Ursie,' interrupted Miss Milicent, before Mrs Richardson could answer, 'but the day-school. We have a plan for the girls. We mean to make good servants of them. They are not to be such good-for-nothings as Kitty Hobson and her set.'

Poor Kitty Hobson! She had become quite a proverb of wickedness; yet Mrs Kemp thought well of her.

Mrs Richardson never interrupted Miss Milicent, which was one reason, I think, of her being such a favourite. She even

waited a second to hear if there was anything more coming, and then she said, 'It is only an experiment, Ursula; but you know how badly some of our girls have turned out lately; and Mr Richardson and I have been thinking whether it would be possible to give them a little domestic teaching before they quite leave school. If we could manage it, we might send them out from the school with a good character, and put them at once in respectable situations, instead of leaving them to chance places.'

'You could take one very well at Sandcombe, Ursie,' said Miss Milicent; 'you must tell your brother about it. And Jenny Dale shall have one too. Any girl who comes under her will have a fair notion of cooking. I think it a first-rate notion. If Jenny won't teach her, I will undertake it myself.'

I tried not to smile at the notion of Miss Milicent's teaching cookery; and, speaking to Mrs Richardson, I asked her to explain a little more clearly what she meant, for I could not see my way to it. Mr Richardson answered, 'I think we all agree that there is a great evil in the present state of things, Ursula,' he said; 'perhaps a lady can see more into it than a gentleman; but it strikes me that the reason why so many of our girls come to misery is, that they are left to make their first start in the world by themselves. They leave school, and have learned to read and write, and do needlework, but they know nothing of household work; and so they can seldom or never go at once into superior service, but are sent to lodging-houses and farms: no offence, Ursula, but you will agree with me that ordinary farm service is not good training for a girl.'

'Very bad,' I said, earnestly, for it had often and often weighed upon my mind.

'Now we think,' continued Mrs Richardson, taking up the sentence where her husband had left it, 'that if a few persons in the parish, who are interested in the girls, would agree to assist us, we might do something towards remedying this evil. Our notion is that the girls, as they grow old enough, should be sent to some house,—say Mrs Weir's, or ours, or Mrs Kemp's, at Longside, to work in the morning, from seven or eight till twelve; having their breakfast, but not their dinner, and going to school in the afternoon.'

'That is the part I don't like,' interrupted Miss Milicent. 'Poor starved creatures! why aren't they to have their dinner?'

'Because if they do,' said Mr Richardson, 'they become an expense, and persons won't choose to burden themselves with

them. I would not even insist upon the breakfast. If they went before eight they should have it, and if not they should get what they could at home. You must remember they are not worse off than they would be if they were regularly at school, and our object is to plan something which shall last, because it only touches time, and not money. You and I, Miss Weir, might be very willing to give the poor children a dinner every day, but Mrs Burton, the surgeon's widow, would never be able to afford it, and so she would never come into our plan.'

'And those who can afford it are to let the children starve for the sake of those who can't,' exclaimed Miss Milicent. 'There is neither rhyme nor reason in that, Mr Richardson.'

'No rhyme, I grant, but I hope some reason,' he replied. 'If we, who can afford it, give the children a dinner, we make the others discontented. There must be one rule for all.'

'Besides,' continued Mrs Richardson, 'there is an exception for Saturday. You may keep your girl all day on Saturday, Miss Weir, and give her sixpence besides, only you are not obliged to do so if you don't like it.'

'And you may want her services on some other day, for the afternoon,' said Mr Richardson, 'and then, if you ask permission, it will be given, and you can bestow another sixpence; so you see there is an opening for as much extravagance as you like. Only remember that you must let her go home by daylight, or you will have the schoolmistress, and the clergyman, and the committee down upon you, and be in our black books for ever after.'

'Well! it's a capital plan,' exclaimed Miss Milicent; 'it will be the making of the girls. I should like to see it begin with that lanky-haired Hetty Smithson. If it answered with her it would for any one.'

'Ursula says nothing,' observed Mrs Richardson.

'I dare say you know all there is to be said better than I do, ma'am,' I replied.

'But you have objections,' remarked Mr Richardson, rather in a disappointed tone.

'I think it might answer very well, sir, if you were always sure of the persons whom the girls would be placed under. It is not the mistresses, but the servants, who will stand in the way.'

'Yes,' said Mr Richardson, 'I have thought of that.'

'If you have good upper servants, whom the girls will obey,'

I continued, 'it will all be easy : but if they are young and flighty, they will only teach the girls evil, and if they are cross they will aggravate them, so that they will never get on together.'

'A difficulty, not an objection,' said Mr Richardson. 'If the plan is tried in six cases and answers only in three, the three are a gain. Nothing can be worse than the way things are managed at present.'

That was true, certainly. I myself had watched Compton girls, sent out into the world, one after another, taking the first place they could meet with, let it be what it might, and often even working in the fields, because they had no opening for service, and, in more cases than I could bear to remember, the end had been grievous. Still I was not very hopeful as to the present scheme. There was distance to be considered, and I mentioned this to Mr Richardson.

He had thought of it, he said, and no doubt it frequently might stand in the way. The plan would be much more easily carried out in a town, or in a small place where the houses were close together, than in a scattered parish like Compton. 'But where there s a will there's a way, Ursula,' he added, with a pleasant smile. 'We want three or four persons who will set their heads and their hearts to work, and consider what is good for the girls, and not what is pleasant to themselves. Then I think the difficulty might be greatly obviated. The children who lived nearest to you would go to you, and those who lived nearest to me would come to me. I think, Miss Milicent, upon that principle, Mrs Kemp would take Hetty Smithson, unless she can be sent to Sandcombe.'

'Mrs Kemp likes good-for-nothing girls,' exclaimed Miss Milicent ; 'she has turned Kitty Hobson out quite new.'

'By a little kindness and care,' said Mrs Richardson. 'That was what first put this idea into our minds. Kitty was seized just at the right moment, and taught that she had a character, which was a fact she had been made to doubt ; and now she thinks it worth while to try and keep it. We want to do the same thing for our girls, before they have reached poor Kitty's "ne'er-do-weel" state.'

'To retain being much more easy than to attain,' said Mr Richardson ; and then, he added, very earnestly, 'There is the analogy of God's dealings with man, to teach us that truth : "Members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the king-

dom of heaven," as the Catechism says ; we have our rank given us from the beginning, and all our struggle thenceforward must be to keep it.'

My mind all this time was dwelling upon Leah and Sandcombe. I did not at all see how the plan was to work there.

Miss Milicent was rather cross because I said so little. 'I wish, Ursie Grant,' she remarked, 'that you would speak out. I am sure Mr Richardson would like it better, and I know I should.'

'I can understand Ursula's feelings,' said Mrs Richardson ; 'she is taken by surprise.'

'Yes, ma'am,' I said ; 'and I doubt whether at Sandcombe we have any one who could look after a child properly.'

'Not yourself?' said Mr Richardson.

'I am not mistress, sir,' was my reply ; and he quite understood, without asking more questions.

'Well!' he said, after a little thought, 'let us make up our minds that it will be a failure,—a failure at least, so far as that many of the children will fail to obtain good from it, and that the persons whom we depend upon to help us will grow weary and give up. Still, is that any reason for not making the attempt? What harm can it do?'

'None,' said Mrs Richardson.

'And,' he continued, 'we will try to hold out a reward for good behaviour. The school is not rich ; but I think we could afford half a sovereign, if not more, to any girl who, having gone out to work in the morning, whilst at school, should afterwards be placed in a permanent situation, and remain in it with a good character for a year. That would, I hope, be a little inducement to the parents to keep their children at school longer ; and, I confess, one of my main hopes of good is in the fact that the girls, even whilst they are learning to be servants, will still feel that they are children, and under school discipline. Besides the afternoon lessons, there will be the Sunday-school and church for them regularly, so that their good habits will be kept up.'

'Well, Ursie, isn't it all right now?' exclaimed Miss Milicent, appealing to me.

But Mr Richardson answered for me. 'Pardon me, Miss Weir ; we won't have Ursula's assent drawn from her unwillingly. We will try the plan, and then she shall say what she thinks of it. All we will ask, Ursula, is that you should men-

tion the notion to Mrs Grant, at Sandcombe, and try to persuade her to let us send a girl to her.'

There was no fear of a refusal. Leah would like any help she could get when there was no eating and drinking in the case ; and I said at once, heartily, that I was sure there would be no difficulty. I confess I felt very glad not to have to give an opinion as to whether the scheme would succeed. I had always a quick eye for difficulties ; and I thought, moreover, that ladies and gentlemen could not well understand the ins and outs of farm-houses.

The principle on which Mr Richardson acted was beyond me then. He said something to his wife just before we parted, which, though it rested in my mind, it required a long experience to understand.

'These are no days for waiting for perfect plans,' he said. 'Evils are crowding upon us so fast, that we must seize the first weapon which offers itself to withstand them, so that it is one which we can use conscientiously ; and we must be contented to fight feebly—to strike at hazard—often uselessly ; yet always with zeal, hope, and faith, remembering that "the battle is not ours, but the Lord's."'

Note.—The plan alluded to has been tried successfully in different places, with modifications according to the wants and peculiarities of the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XXX.

'YOU will find my mother in her room, Ursie,' said Miss Millicent ; and she walked on with Mrs Richardson, whilst I went back to the cottage alone, pondering in my own mind upon the strange way we human beings have of looking at our duties ; and how Miss Millicent could throw her whole heart and soul into a plan for making Esther Smithson a good respectable girl, and yet could not put herself out of her way for an hour to cheer her poor sick mother. I hope I did not forget that I was liable to the same kind of delusion myself.

Jenny Dale kept me talking for a few minutes in the kitchen, before I could go up-stairs. She was full of complaints ; and I could almost fancy that things were worse, because I was not

there. Mrs Temple, she said, was becoming so domineering, there was no bearing her. She had actually taken to ordering dinner, and came out into the kitchen every morning, and would peer about in the larder to see after the scraps. She was very fond of having scrap dinners for the kitchen, and did not approve of having the bits given away; and this had nearly caused a downright quarrel between her and Jenny; for Jenny had been told by Miss Milicent to keep the bits, and give them to the poor people who were down in Mr Richardson's list. Miss Milicent had interfered, and been angry; but I suppose she did not see that she had no one to thank for the storms but herself. I told Jenny plainly that I thought she ought not to give in to Mrs Temple, but go to Miss Milicent at once, whenever such things were done, and she promised me she would; but she was a weak kind of woman, and I could not reckon much upon her words. Then she complained of Fanny, who was made much of by Mrs Temple, because she waited upon her. Fanny was always a little inclined to be set up, and Mrs Temple had turned her into a kind of lady's maid, for she and Cotton had quarrelled, and Cotton would do nothing for her. Fanny dressed Mrs Temple in the morning, and was learning to do her hair, and Mrs Temple talked to her all the time; and Fanny, it seemed, was beginning to think herself a great person. Oh, dear! the mischief that one tiresome woman may do in a house!

I did not say half nor a quarter of what I thought about it all, but I went up-stairs to Mrs Weir in no very pleasant humour. The ill-feeling vanished directly I saw her. She was by herself, which was a great relief, and looking so sweet and kind—but thin, and I fancied rather harassed.

'I heard you were here half an hour ago, Ursula,' she said, as I went up to her sofa, 'and I have been hoping you would come up to me; but my niece said you were gone back part of the way to the Parsonage, and I have no doubt that was pleasant for you.'

'Mr Richardson wished to speak to me, ma'am,' I said; 'that was the reason I went. I hoped you had not been told I was come. I know you don't like waiting.'

'I am afraid, Ursula, I do not like many things. I have wished to see you often since you went away; but you have not been able, I suppose, to take so long a walk.'

I was just a little chilled by her manner, and answered, 'I have not stirred beyond the farm, ma'am, except to go to church

on Sundays. My brother's going, and the settling in a new place, have taken up all my time.'

'Very likely, Ursula; but you promised; I should not have thought so much about it else.'

The tone was a little—a very little—impatient; but the poor, dear lady was on the watch, and a smile came over her face directly after, and she held out her hand to me, and said, 'If we did not like persons, Ursula, we should not care how long they stayed away from us. Will you sit down and tell me about your brother?'

And I did sit down, and told her everything I could think of; making it, as well as I could, into a kind of story, for that was what she liked. She was no great talker, indeed talking soon tired her; but she enjoyed listening; and even when I was a little girl, I was in the habit of describing minutely what I did and said, yet with great exactness, for she was very quick and particular, and always stopped me when she thought I was in the least exaggerating. She used to say to me that the habit of exaggeration is a leak in a person's character, through which truth, and therefore confidence, escape unnoticed. This may seem rather contrary to what I said before of her liking to live in a dream, but it is not so really. There is a great difference between inventing facts and arranging them. Mrs Weir had a special power of the latter kind, and I think being with her had helped me a little in the same way, for it certainly was not in me by nature. Her eye turned to what was bright and beautiful in everything—mine, I am afraid, was inclined rather to the reverse. If we had both looked upwards on a summer day, her gaze would have rested upon the blue sky, mine would have dwelt upon the clouds.

It did me good to talk about Roger and my new life in this way; it was rather like reading a book, and took off the hard edge from my troubles. For a short time I was so carried away that I could have imagined myself back again at Dene; but there was an end to the enjoyment very soon. The door happened to be open. I heard in the passage the kind of sweeping rustle which always accompanied Mrs Temple's movements, and Mrs Weir's attention was immediately withdrawn from me, and she said, a little nervously, 'I think, Ursula, you had better explain to my niece why you were not able to come and see me before. She thought that it seemed unkind, but I was sure that it was not.'

Explain to Mrs Temple ! Why should I ? My proud temper was up at the very notion. When she came in I would willingly have left the room, but she waved her hand graciously, and said, ' Sit down, Ursula, don't let me disturb you. My dear aunt, I have brought you your medicine.'

' It is a tonic, Ursula,' said Mrs Weir, looking at me. ' My niece has persuaded me to try it, and I think it does me a great deal of good.'

' I hope it may, ma'am,' I said ; though I could scarcely find it in my heart to be pleased with any remedy proposed by Mrs Temple.

Mrs Weir smiled as she used to when I was a child, and she wanted to put good thoughts into my head. ' I *pray* that it may, Ursula,' she said ; ' and I have not had the neuralgic pain so violently since I have tried it, so I have great reason to be thankful.'

Mrs Temple chimed in with a sentence of the same kind ; yet what I listened to with pleasure and profit when spoken by Mrs Weir, was utterly distasteful to me when uttered by her niece. Doubtless it was the sense of effort and a want of reality. Mrs Weir's words were natural, Mrs Temple's forced. From Mrs Weir, indeed, I could bear anything. She seemed always to understand how and when to introduce religion. She never jarred upon me by dragging it in at a wrong moment ; and I was then much more sensitive upon that point than I am now. Young people, with the hopes and joys of this life before them, shrink from the sudden mention of subjects connected with death and eternity ; but when the thought of death rises with us in the morning, and lies down with us at night, and eternity is the long day on which we feel that we have even now entered, there is no moment at which a reference to them can find us unprepared.

Mrs Weir, in her simple way, took her niece's words as being spoken in all earnestness, but she was not disposed to say much ; indeed, I could not help perceiving that she was less at ease with me now than before we were interrupted. Mrs Temple, who never thought it possible for her to interrupt any one, sat herself down opposite to us, as though determined to listen to what we were saying. I was resolved not to seem awed by her, so I went on with something I had been telling Mrs Weir about Roger, but Mrs Temple scarcely let me finish my sentence before she broke in with—

'My dear aunt, forgive me for reminding you, but have you spoken to Ursula about the chess-board? The circumstance requires to be cleared up.'

Mrs Weir's pale face was tinged with pink; the nearest approach to excitement which ever betrayed itself. 'It is of no consequence, Matilda; I would rather nothing should be said about it.'

'But it is right, my dear aunt; excuse me, but such mysteries ought to be investigated.'

'Do you mean, ma'am, about the broken chessman?' I replied.

'Yes; you see, aunt, she knows it;' and Mrs Temple was put quite off her guard, and spoke hurriedly. 'We have reason to complain, Ursula, that it was not mentioned before. It was due to Mrs Weir that it should have been, and it has interfered with her excellent intentions; the little toy is quite useless now, and it might have been turned to excellent account.'

'But it does not signify, Ursula,' said Mrs Weir, gently; 'only if you had told me that the chessman was broken, I should have been less sorry.'

'Really, ma'am,' I exclaimed, and I stood up, and I have no doubt looked very angry, 'I don't understand you.'

Mrs Temple's voice sank to the softest tone, as she answered for her aunt, 'Restrain yourself, Ursula. Recollect that agitation may do harm.'

'I do not care about it, Ursula,' said Mrs Weir, her voice shaking, and her hand trembling. 'I had no wish to mention the subject; indeed, I do not care. I cannot bear to vex you.' She took hold of my hand and looked at me quite beseechingly.

'Dear ma'am,' I said, 'you can't vex me. I could bear anything from you; but, if you please, I will go into another room and have my say with Mrs Temple, for I must know what she thinks, and what you think too.'

'There is no occasion for any such explanation,' replied Mrs Temple; 'we only wish to warn you, Ursula, as you are setting out in life by yourself, that openness and straightforwardness will gain you more friends than the contrary line of conduct.'

'But you were in haste when you left me,' said Mrs Weir, 'and you were unhappy; I have no doubt that you did not remember it, Ursula; if you please, we will think no more about it?'

By this time I was so indignant that the very strength of my

feelings forced me to try and put a restraint upon them. 'I have not been told yet, ma'am,' I said, 'what I have been accused of. I imagine Mrs Temple means to say that I was like a naughty child, and, having broken the chessman, did not like to mention it. I may have broken it, I won't say that I did not. I am afraid I have not the knack of handling such delicate things properly, but I had no idea of having done it.'

'Only you knew what we meant the moment the subject was brought forward,' said Mrs Temple, and she looked at Mrs Weir triumphantly.

Was it in human nature to bear such an aggravation quietly? I know it was not in mine; and it was in no gentle tone that I answered, 'If you would have the goodness, ma'am, to inquire before you make charges, you would be more likely to be correct. Miss Milicent mentioned that the chessman was broken, and that was the first I heard of it. If you please, ma'am,' I added, speaking to Mrs Weir, 'I will come and see you again another day, for I am sure you are quite tired now, and I am very sorry I have been the cause of it.'

I could not help saying this, for Mrs Weir was looking so ill from nervousness and vexation that she quite fidgeted me. Mrs Temple suggested that she would be the better for a little more of the medicine, and made me pour it out whilst she gave it. She made no answer herself to anything I had said, but treated me coldly and haughtily, whilst Mrs Weir, whose voice was quite faint, could only manage to say, in broken sentences: 'I have no doubt it is right. Ursula, if you will come again soon, I shall be better, I dare say. I hope you will hear from Mr Grant; you will please to let me know when you do.'

Explanation and conversation were out of the question in such a state of things, and as for staying to help Mrs Weir, it was simply useless. Mrs Temple had stepped into all her ways, and the poor lady turned to her as naturally as she used to do to me. I stood by her side a few minutes, and was asked to fetch a shawl, but I was not allowed to put it over her. Evidently I had no further business with her. Mrs Temple said, in a very pointed way: 'My aunt has had too much agitation, Ursula; she needs perfect rest;' and all I could do was to wish Mrs Weir good-bye, without saying another word.

I found Miss Milicent waiting for me at the foot of the stairs: 'Come here, Ursie,' she said; and she opened the dining-room door. 'I want to speak to you; you have no need to be

in a hurry, I told Jenny Dale to get you a cup of tea before you went back.'

'It is very good of you, Miss Milicent,' I replied, 'but if you please, I had rather go.' Instead of entering the dining-room I drew back.

'That's perverse of you, Ursie ; I have a great deal to say to you, and you must stay. What have you paid such a short visit for?'

'Mrs Weir was tired,' I replied ; 'and I think, Miss Milicent, that having Mrs Temple and me together was too much for her.'

'Oh ! that is the matter, is it?' she exclaimed ; 'I was sure by your face something had gone wrong ; but Ursie, I told you how it would be if you went away, so you have no one to thank but yourself.'

'And Mrs Temple,' I could not help adding. 'Indeed, Miss Milicent, I can't believe that anything would be wrong if she was away.'

'Come in ; why will you stand talking in the passage?' She seized my dress, and actually forced me to enter, shutting the door behind her. 'Now, sit down, and hear what I have to say, Ursie Grant ; it is all your doing, and, what is more, worse things will come. She is rooted here ; she never would have been that if you had remained. You would have made the house too hot to hold her.'

I did not think that much of a compliment, I confess, but, before I could reply, Miss Milicent continued : 'She has been working at my mother ever since you went away, putting things into her head ; and my mother, as you know well enough, always takes what is given her without asking questions ; so Matilda has had it all her own way. No use for me to say anything, even if I had time, and I have been very busy. Mr Temple has been finding out new creatures for my glass, and he and I have been down on the shore a good deal ; and twice a week there is a class of ploughboys and such like, who come to me to learn to write and cipher ; and all that, to say nothing of putting the house to rights, has taken up more time than I can say. So you see there has been no one to interfere with Matilda Temple, and the end is that she has bewitched my mother, who can't get on without her. Then the servants have all been at sixes and sevens. Cotton and Matilda Temple have quarrelled, and Jenny Dale threatens to leave, and what is to become of us all I don't know,

for Fanny, poor silly thing, says she can't do the work she used, because she wants time to read Mrs Temple's books. If it was not for the girl from the school who is to come now, we might just stand still altogether.'

I did not see what Miss Milicent meant by standing still ; I always had a notion that there was no standing still in this life,—that it was always going on, in some form or other ; the difference being only whether you drove yourself, or let others drive you.

But Miss Milicent continued, and my ideas became clearer. 'It's a great trouble all this, Ursie, and if you were here, as I said before, it wouldn't have happened. But there is a new notion come up, which Matilda Temple thinks is to set everything right, and I should just like to know your opinion about it.'

'For Mrs Temple to go and live at Stonecliff?' I said.

'Now, who told you that? How things do get about! But it is not that exactly. She is wild to go there herself, but she and her husband can't go alone because of the expense ; and she wants us to join housekeeping, and share the rent between us.'

'Live together!' I exclaimed, in a tone of amazement. 'O Miss Milicent!'

'I knew what you would say,' she replied, in a disappointed tone. 'I told her that I was sure any one who knew the ways of the house,—and I mentioned you particularly,—would decide that it couldn't be. But she took the high hand then, and said she didn't know why we were to trouble ourselves with the opinions of this person or that ; what we chose to do ourselves was the question.'

'Mrs Temple was right there, Miss Milicent,' I replied. 'It could not be of consequence what I, or any one in my position, might say, though, of course, we are at liberty to form an opinion for ourselves, and I can't but think you would do better if you never mentioned my name to Mrs Temple.'

'She can't abide you, Ursie Grant, and that's a fact,' said Miss Milicent, thrusting her hands into the pockets of her jacket ; 'I don't know what you have done to spite her.'

'Let her see that I don't like her, I suppose, Miss Milicent,' I replied ; 'there can't be a greater offence than that for any one.'

Miss Milicent laughed. 'Matilda might hate me too, if it was only that,' she said ; 'but, anyhow, we are neither of us in her

good books just now, for I kept back in giving an opinion about this new plan, and I said I should talk it over with you, just because you knew my mother so much better than any one else.'

Those blundering ways! Miss Milicent could have done nothing worse, either for herself or me.

'If you will excuse my saying so,' I replied, 'I think, Miss Milicent, you made a mistake there. As for this new plan, you really must be the judge yourself. I don't know how the money matters would answer, and I can't pretend to say whether Mrs Weir would like it.'

'There is no doubt of that,' she replied; 'my mother is like a child in giving up, and certainly Matilda does know how to manage her. She has got her to dress an hour earlier since you went away; and yesterday my mother actually went for a drive for the first time since we came here. I should never have thought of the plan for a moment, if I had not felt that it would be lonely for her when the Temples were gone.'

'Then the money question is the only difficulty,' I said. 'Perhaps, Miss Milicent, your lawyer could help you about that better than I can.'

'You have a twist, Ursie Grant; you don't like the plan, and you won't say it out like an honest woman.'

'I have no objection to saying it out,' I replied. 'I don't like the plan, Miss Milicent: but my liking or disliking has nothing to do with it.'

It had, though; more than I could at the moment see. Miss Milicent's conscience was uneasy, and she wanted support. She felt that she was putting ease for the present before what would be good in the long run; that is what many of us do.

'And why don't you like it?' she inquired.

'I beg your pardon if I have to speak plainly,' I replied; 'but, Miss Milicent, I don't think that mixing two families together ever answers, unless it is so ordered by God that it cannot be helped; and then His blessing goes with it and makes things smooth.'

'We shouldn't quarrel,' said Miss Milicent; 'we have not quarrelled now. I should keep house, and Matilda Temple would look after my mother.'

I smiled. This reversing of duties reminded me of what had passed in my own mind when I disliked going to Sandcombe. I could not help saying, 'That sounds very much, Miss Milicent,

as though you were Mr Temple's wife, and Mrs Temple was Mrs Weir's daughter.'

'It might have been better if it had been so,' she said; 'not that I could have married a little man like Mr Temple; he is too meek; but we get on very well together.'

'They are on a visit,' I replied. 'People on a visit and people at home are very different.'

'It would give me time to help Mrs Richardson,' continued Miss Milicent; 'and if Matilda Temple had a larger house, she could have a friend or two occasionally to see her, and that would help to amuse my mother.'

Or rather, as I could not help saying to myself, save Miss Milicent the trouble of doing it. The whole scheme seemed to me so silly, that I had scarcely patience to talk of it. I was silent for a few seconds, and, indeed, looked towards the door, as though I intended to go.

'Speak out!' exclaimed Miss Milicent; 'I know you have a good opinion of your own judgment, Ursie Grant.'

'No, indeed, Miss Milicent,' I answered; 'I have had too much experience of it lately to have a good opinion of it. I could not say that the plan is a wrong one, or that it mayn't be a comfort to Mrs Weir, or set you more free. But I do think that it is against the common ways of the world, and, in a measure, of the Bible too, and so I don't think it will answer.'

'The Bible!' she exclaimed; 'well, that is too foolish! What has the Bible to do with our taking Stonecliff?'

'You know, Miss Milicent,' I replied, 'that when God ordered men to marry, He told them that they were not only to cleave to their wives, but to leave their fathers and mothers. It strikes me that must have meant that they were to live distinct, what we call setting up housekeeping for themselves. And being placed in separate families, I suppose we should do well to remain so.'

'It is no argument at all!' exclaimed Miss Milicent. 'If people were to act in that way, the world couldn't go on.'

I did not feel that it was an argument; a great deal might be said against it; but I did think it a kind of hint, and I knew that it was safer to follow God's hints than man's reasons. But Miss Milicent was not a person whom any one could really talk to with any hope of convincing her. That one great omission in her duties—her neglect of her mother—had warped her mind. She never dared look her own motives in the face; and so,

though naturally truth-telling and open, she had got into a way of deceiving herself. She did not like Mrs Temple ; she neither trusted nor respected her ; but she liked anything better than having her time taken up by attending upon her mother ; and so she smoothed it all over, and thought she was only wishing to do what would be best for every one, and make Mrs Weir most comfortable. She would not, however, say this, when she found that I did not give in ; she kept on repeating that it was only an idea, it might never come to anything. Mrs Temple might change her mind ; Mrs Weir might not like it. But I knew in my heart that it would come, even if it had been twenty times as objectionable. I knew it as surely as we may all know by experience, that the proposal which is brought forward year after year, by those who rule the nation, let it be never so contrary to long-established custom, or even justice and religion, will in the end become law, because people will have become accustomed to it. If Miss Milicent had been told the first night of Mrs Temple's arrival that she could ever have endured the prospect of living with her, she would have said it was impossible. Watching the course of the world, I have often thought, that if we could see the devil himself frequently, we should at least learn to like him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AND so I went back to Sandcombe—with what feelings of vexation and disappointment there is no need to say. Miss Milicent pressed my having tea, but I had no heart to stay. Perhaps I was more worried than I ought to have been ; and if I could have thrown off all care for Mrs Weir and her concerns, it might have been the happier for me. But it was not in my nature to do that ; I did really love her ; I would have done anything in my power to comfort her ; whilst I dare say there was something of wounded pride, in the knowledge that now I was no longer necessary to her. As an especial aggravation, came the consciousness that with all her goodness she was very likely to be prejudiced, and that nothing would be more easy than for Mrs Temple to continue to insinuate things to my disadvantage—even as she had already begun. I had said nothing to Miss

Milicent about the broken chessman, I felt ashamed of justifying myself from such a charge ; but I made up my mind not to go to the Heath again for some time, lest I might give some fresh cause of offence ; and especially, I resolved to wait until some more settled plan had been decided about Stonecliff. I had no confidence in Miss Milicent's tact or discretion ; and I was sure that what I said was likely to be repeated to Mrs Temple, and by her to be turned in some way against me. The visit did me good, however, in one way ; it kept me from pining after my former life, and enabled me to sit down more contentedly to my duties at Sandcombe ; and these soon became quite sufficient to occupy me thoroughly.

Leah, as I expected, took kindly enough to the notion of a school-girl coming to help,—that was the way she talked of it, and I could not put any other idea into her head, though I knew well enough that the help which a girl of that age could give was much less than the trouble of looking after her. Still I felt it was right to aid Mrs Richardson if possible. The three head girls in the school were to go out at once. Mrs Kemp was to take one ; another was to work at the Parsonage ; and Esther Smithson was to come to us. The plan was not actually carried out till after harvest, when we were obliged to have extra help. Up to that time we had a girl on baking and washing and brewing days ; but the maid and I managed to do all the rest of the work, of course with the assistance of Leah ; who, to say the truth, was not so much a fine lady as selfish and disposed to be lazy. I did not dislike the life ; indeed I should have been fond of it, if I had been living with people who understood and gave me sympathy. But it was all business and money-getting from morning till night ; the very clods of earth seemed to be looked at only with the thought of how they might be turned into bank notes and gold. Yet it was only for a year, I said to myself, and when I had received Roger's first letter, telling me he had arrived in Canada, and was making himself useful to the gentleman who took him out, and looking out for the best means of settling himself permanently, I felt as if half the time of separation was over.

One thing I felt about Sandcombe was, that it was very out of the way. To be sure the same might have been said of Dene, but there I had interest enough in the place and the people never to wish to go further, except to Longside, where I was always welcome. At Sandcombe, though Leah often went out, and

sometimes had friends to tea, there were none whom I cared particularly to meet ; and indeed, as often as not, Leah would make the excuse of my being at home for William and herself to go out and leave me behind.

It was about half-past four o'clock one afternoon, just in the beginning of September ; I had been sitting at work by myself, making a silk jacket for Jane Shaw, whose wedding was to come off in about three weeks, and who had asked me to do some little things she had not time for herself, and did not choose to put into the hands of a town dressmaker. I was enjoying being alone, and counting the days till I could hear again from Roger ; Leah had been in and out of the parlour all the afternoon, doing first one thing and then another ; and a few words with her, and the farm-house sounds, which I always liked particularly, prevented me from feeling lonely, especially as I was very intent upon my work, wishing to finish it that evening. Presently Leah came in to me in a hurry, and said, ' Ursie, there's a chaise coming down the lane ; I do think it must be the Kemps. I wish you would just go and skim the milk for me, for Martha is too busy, and you must mind and bring in cream enough for tea. If it is the Kemps, they will be sure to stay.'

This was a little instance of the kind of thing Leah was constantly doing. She knew the Kemps always came particularly to see me, and that I should be vexed at missing any part of their visit, but she still seized upon them as an excuse for making me do her duties. I said nothing, however, but put down my work directly, and went to the dairy, looking up the lane as I passed through the yard, and seeing Mrs Kemp and Mary in the chaise, and John Hervey driving them, as was natural.

I was detained longer in the dairy than I intended, for Martha was untidy in her ways, and I happened to see the bucket which the man was going to use for the evening milking, and it was not properly washed ; so I had to find fault, which was what I very much disliked, as I always felt that fault-finding ought never to be the business of more than one person in a house. Martha was cross, too, and would do just contrary to what I wished. She saw visitors, and knew they were likely to give her work and keep her in the house, and I was sure she wanted to be out of doors gossiping, a thing which she particularly liked, and I especially dreaded. Altogether it was as much as half an hour before I could get back to the parlour.

Leah made a kind of apology when I went in, and said she

did not think I should have been kept so long ; 'but you need not mind so much, Ursie,' she added, 'for Mrs Kemp has come to drink tea.'

'I did not say that,' replied Mrs Kemp, good-naturedly ; 'though a cup of tea never comes amiss. But the days are beginning to close in, and we must not be late, especially as we are driving.'

John Hervey laughed, and said that was a slur on his driving. He could make his way over the hill at midnight, he was sure ; and if he could not, the horse could, which was better.

'Fogs are worse than darkness, I always think,' said Mary Kemp ; 'and there is one coming up now, I do believe.'

No one had noticed it before, yet it was already quite thick ; but that was the way with those sea fogs, they rushed over the hill all of a sudden, and then cleared away, as it seemed, without any cause.

'I thought, Ursie,' said John, 'that you might have been at Compton lately, which was one reason I had for coming here. I have not been there myself, I can't tell the time when.'

'Mrs Weir is going to take Stonecliff, so William heard in Hove, on Saturday,' said Leah. 'But Ursie is so close, we have not heard it from her, even if she knows it.'

Mr Hervey only remarked that he never believed one half of what he heard in Hove.

'Had not I better go and see about tea ?' I asked, for I wanted an excuse to go away. I never liked talking about Mrs Weir before strangers.

'Perhaps you might as well,' said Leah. 'Here is the key of the closet. I wish you would bring in some of that pound cake which William is so fond of. I should like Mrs Kemp to taste it.'

'Pound cake of your making, Ursie ?' asked Mrs Kemp.

'Yes,' I said. 'It was one of Mrs Mason's receipts ; but Martha was careless with the oven, and it is rather burnt.'

'Martha is enough to plague one's life out,' said Leah. 'If we were not going to try this new girl from the Compton school, I should tell William we must send her away.'

'When is your new girl coming ?' asked Mrs Kemp.

'To-morrow, I believe ; isn't it, Ursie ? It is Ursie's concern. She has undertaken to teach her.'

'Not quite,' I replied. 'I said I would look after her as well as I could in the morning, but I never promised more.'

'I shall wish you joy if she is like our girl, Ursie,' said Mary Kemp; 'she is duller than dull; Kitty Hobson was a treasure to her.'

'And what has become of Kitty?' asked Leah.

'She's gone to be kitchen-maid at Mr Stewart's,' replied Mrs Kemp. 'I knew the cook, and she promised to look after her, and I have great hopes that Kitty will turn out well.'

'More than I have,' said Leah; 'but girls are all alike. I dare say we shan't find this new one any better than the rest.'

'It depends upon what you expect,' said Mrs Kemp. 'One can't put old heads on young shoulders, and so one must make up one's mind to take trouble, and look after them, else of course they will go wrong. I was obliged to be strict with Kitty, for when she came to Longside first, she was out in the yard talking at all hours; but my Mary took her in hand, and gave her plenty to do, and saw that she did it, and sent her to bed early, before the men and boys had their supper, and by the time she left us, we had worked her out of a good many of her idle ways. Then, to be sure, I must say Mary has a way with her,' added Mrs Kemp, with a mother's pride. 'She used to make the girl read to her on Sundays; and now and then Kitty sat with her and helped in the house needlework, and that gave her a notion of being more tidy and respectable in her ways. It was giving her a lift in the world, which, I suppose, is what we all want.'

I had lingered to hear what Mrs Kemp was saying, hoping to gain some hints for myself, but I saw Leah look impatient, and indeed time was running on fast, and, much against my inclination, I went to get tea.

I did not notice that John Hervey followed me, but, as I was taking the cake out of the closet, he came behind me, and quite startled me by offering to carry it for me.

'You don't want me,' he said, laughing, as he noticed my look of surprise.

'To tell the truth, I don't think I do,' I replied; 'Leah is not fond of having persons spying about her cupboards.'

'I don't want to look at the cupboard, I only want to have a few words with you, Ursie; and there is no chance of our being alone, that I can see. Have you heard about Mrs Weir and Stonecliff?'

'Since you ask,' I replied, 'I must needs say I have; but it is no business of mine.'

He stood thinking; then he said, 'It won't do, Ursie, and it ought to be prevented.'

'Who is to prevent it?' I asked. 'What business have either you or I with it?'

'With me it's just this,' he answered. 'Mrs Weir's family have always been very kind to my family; and if it was not for them I shouldn't be where I am. She is left here to manage for herself, with no more knowledge than a baby what to do; and Miss Milicent not much wiser; and so, if one sees them likely to make a blunder, one would fain, if one could, stop them.'

'If you mean as regards money,' I said, 'Miss Milicent is not likely to be misled there; she has a sharp eye.'

'Not so sharp as Mrs Temple,' said John; 'she will squeeze every penny out of them, if they live together, and make her share of expenses a third, instead of half. I know her of old, for I have had dealings with her. Ursie, you must try and talk over Miss Milicent.'

'Not I,' I replied; 'I have given up trying to talk over any one. The world must go its own way.'

A cloud came over his face. 'That is not as you used to talk, Ursie,' he said. 'I remember the time when you would have made any venture to be of use to such a friend as Mrs Weir has been to you.'

'That was when I was young,' I replied, trying to laugh, though my heart was heavy. 'I have grown wiser since.'

'It can't be wisdom to let people go to ruin without stretching out a hand to save them,' he replied.

'Who is to say it is ruin?' was my answer; 'I am sure I couldn't. Indeed, Mr Hervey, we must leave Mrs Weir to manage her own concerns; or, if any one is to interfere, it can't be myself.'

'It won't be me,' he said, rather quickly. 'Well! Ursie, I didn't think you were so changeable.'

I turned round upon him at the word. 'Changeable!' I exclaimed; 'I am sure I have never shown myself so.'

'One week bent upon living with Mrs Weir, and the next not troubling yourself to go near her, and not willing to put yourself out of your way to serve her,' he said; 'I don't know what you call that but changeable.'

'I know what I call fault-finding without reason or knowledge, Mr Hervey,' I said; for, my proud temper being roused,

I could not bring myself to explain what made me seem changeable.

He turned off with a laugh ; but I noticed that, instead of going back to the parlour, he went out into the garden ; and my conscience reproached me, for I knew I had been wrong. Still he had no business to take me to task in that way ; and it was talking in ignorance to suppose that I had any power to prevent Mrs Weir and Miss Milicent from doing whatever they wished. I fancied that I had some right to be cross with him, and I was cross, and said to myself that, with all his good-natured looks and ways, he was much more fond of ordering and correcting than Roger. So far, Mary Kemp was well fitted to him. She would obey him without a word. As for me, I had not yet thoroughly learned to obey any one.

Leah was quite put out when I went back ; I had been so long getting tea. She asked me what I had been doing.

'Talking to John Hervey,' said Mary Kemp, laughing ; 'I saw them together.'

'Yes,' I replied ; 'Mr Hervey came out after me, and we had a few words together ; but I should have been quicker, only the water did not boil.'

'I don't think it boils now,' said Leah, pouring out a cup of tea. 'There's no strength in the tea. Come, Mrs Kemp, take your seat ; and, Mary, there's a place for you. Ursie, just run out into the yard, will you ? and tell William to come ; he's sure to be there.'

I did as I was asked, and turning the corner of the house sharply, I came full upon John Hervey.

'Friends, Ursie ?' he said, and he held out his hand to me.

'Friends, if you will,' I answered ; 'but I didn't know we were enemies, Mr Hervey.'

'Well ! not quite enemies,' he said, smiling ; 'only just inclined to snap at one another. But, Ursie, you will have a thought for Mrs Weir, if possible ?'

He seemed the most pertinacious man I had ever met with, the most determined to carry his point ; and so, out of a mere spirit of contradiction, I answered : 'I have a great many thoughts for Mrs Weir always, Mr Hervey. Whether I shall have many words is quite another question.'

'You are a perverse body,' he said, lightly ; and he went into the house, leaving me vexed that I had not been able to vex him more. It was not that I didn't like and respect him heartily

but I believe nothing provokes us women more than to find that we can't teaze when we wish to do so.

Tea was rather hurried over, for the fog was becoming heavier. William said they had better wait for the chance of its clearing off after the sun went down, but Mrs Kemp thought the farmer would be fidgety, and they had better get home as soon as they could. She pressed me very much to go and spend a day with them at Longside, but Leah declared I couldn't be spared. The new girl was coming, and I should be wanted to teach her.

'Look after her, more than teach her, Ursie,' said Mrs Kemp to me, in a low voice, which Leah couldn't hear. 'And, lassie, if you can with truth, give her a little praise at first setting off. The farmer says it's needful for us all, as capital to begin the world with.'

Mary Kemp was anxious to go ; she was rather a coward, and if the fog continued, she declared they were as likely as not to miss their way. But, in spite of all she could say, Mr Hervey would linger to say a few words to me about Roger. I had forgotten my perverseness, and was very glad to talk to him upon the subject nearest my heart, but I could not help thinking that he was not as mindful of Mary as he might have been, and it gave me the first really uncomfortable feeling I had ever had about him ; a misgiving lest, after all, he might be selfish, and even rather cold, in spite of his hearty, pleasant ways.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ESTHER SMITHSON was at Sandcombe the next morning by half-past six o'clock : that was as early as could be expected, for she had a good way to walk. Leah took it as a matter of course that I was to be down-stairs to look after her, and I was not sorry for it, as it enabled me at once to arrange her work, so as to put her to that which was most fitting for her. I found her untidy, but clever and willing. From the first I was determined that she should not be made a mere drudge to wait upon the men, and Martha and I had a little fight upon the subject that very morning, but I gained my point. My mother would have been particular about me, and it was my duty to be particular about Esther, all the more because she came of an idle

family, and was likely to have a bad example set her at home. But I was not to have my own way quite so easily. When the morning work was over, and William, and Leah, and I, sat down to dinner, Leah said to me, 'Well! Ursie, what do you think of Esther? is she likely to do?'

'It is early to judge,' I replied, 'but she seems willing and handy. She set out the breakfast things quite cleverly.'

'Set out the breakfast things!' exclaimed Leah; 'you don't mean to say she has been in here this morning?' and she looked round the room with a turn of her lip, as though she had seen something disagreeable.

'It was part of her business,' I said; 'I saw how she did it, and took care that she was tidy and clean in her ways; and I found her very willing to learn.'

William spoke now, and quite in Leah's tone. 'I must tell you once for all, Ursie, for it is better to come to an understanding plainly, I don't want your dirty, slatternly school-girls fussing about in my parlour. They have the kitchen and the scullery for their proper place, and I must beg you will keep them there.'

'But Esther is come to learn to be a servant,' I said, 'and she can't learn if she is not put in the way.'

'She is come to make herself useful,' said Leah, 'and specially to take the odds and ends of work, which you, and I, and Martha, don't choose to do.'

'Mrs Richardson doesn't understand this,' was my reply. 'The agreement was that Esther was to be taught.'

'And she will be taught,' replied Leah. 'If she is a girl of any sense, she will learn of her own accord; and if she has no sense, all the teaching in the world won't give her any.'

'We have not set up a school for idiots, yet,' said William, with a short laugh.

'It is what Ursie will set up some day,' I do believe,' replied Leah.

'Mrs Mason used to take a great deal of pains with me, and I should like to do the same with Esther,' I replied; 'and as for trying to teach, unless one is willing to make sacrifices, it seems to me nonsense to attempt it.'

'Possibly,' replied Leah, 'but we don't profess to teach here; the teaching has been done at Compton school. When girls go out into the world, they must learn to make their own way.'

'Toss them in, and let them sink or swim as they may,' I

exclaimed, rather bitterly. 'Leah, that was not your case nor mine.'

'It was mine,' exclaimed Leah. 'I went my own way from the time I left Mrs Prince's school, at Hove, and that was when I was fifteen, just a few months older than Esther Smithson.' She drew herself up with a proud air, as though defying any one to say a word against her.

I was silent; it was no use to continue the argument, and, after all, Leah was mistress. But, in my own mind, I determined that if I found it really impossible to be of use to the poor child, I would ask Mrs Richardson to look out for another situation for her.

Leah watched me narrowly after that conversation, being afraid, I could see, that I was going to make too much of Esther, but I was careful not to offend her; and, indeed, I did not wish myself to be too particular about the girl. I only wanted to give her the kind of work which would keep her out of the way of gossiping and idle talking with the men about the farm. Esther was much given to chattering, and, though I did not encourage her, she told me of her own accord some things which I certainly was much interested in hearing.

Her mother had been sent for to work at Stonecliff, the large house under Compton Heath. It was to be cleaned and put in order for a family who were to take possession almost immediately, and Esther said was nearly sure that it was Mrs Temple who had given all the orders. This confirmed Mr Hervey's information, and settled my mind as to saying anything to Miss Milicent. If matters had gone as far as that, it would be useless.

The news was confirmed a few days after; when, as I was sitting alone by myself, at work, there was a knock at the front door, and I heard some one say—

'Is Ursula Grant at home?' The voice took me quite by surprise. It was Mrs Temple's. I thought I had better go out to her. She was in a little pony-chaise; one that belonged to the hotel, and Mr Temple was with her. I asked them to get out and walk in, and Mr Temple seemed willing, but Mrs Temple declined. They must return at once, she said. She had only called about a little matter of business; perhaps it would be as well to see Mrs Grant. 'Mrs Grant is not at home, ma'am,' I replied; for Leah had gone over to her mother at Hatton.

'Well, then! perhaps you will do as well, if you will explain.

My dear, the pony is fidgety, just get out and stand by its head.' And Mr Temple, being always obedient, alighted.

A cold wind was blowing, and I was afraid of toothache, and put my apron round my head, but Mrs Temple did not notice it, and kept me standing in the draught. 'I wanted to inquire about having butter from Sandcombe,' she said. 'I shall want enough for rather a large family;—Mr Temple, and myself, Mrs and Miss Weir, and our servants, besides friends!—we are to be at Stonecliff.' She looked at me as though I had been an utter stranger, who had never heard of her before.

I did not appear surprised, or even interested, but merely said, 'We send our butter to Hove, ma'am, generally.'

'I suppose you do; but of course you would be willing to accommodate persons in the neighbourhood. We find it difficult to procure good butter, and I am particular about it.'

'I will speak to Mrs Grant,' was my reply.

I think she was struck by the tone, for she added more graciously, 'Mrs Weir would have a claim upon you, I am sure.'

'Certainly, ma'am, my brother and I—all of us would do anything we could for Mrs Weir,' I answered. 'But the butter can always be bought at Hove.'

'Yes, perhaps so; but I should prefer—you have a girl here who comes from Compton school, she might bring it over.'

She was bent upon saving the carriage, I saw that in an instant.

'The girl's hours would scarcely suit, I am afraid, ma'am,' I replied; 'and the butter for a large family would be a load for her.'

'Oh! a strong girl; she would not care, and she must learn to make herself useful. Mrs Richardson would wish it. She is one of the Compton girls, I know; there can be no difficulty.'

'I could promise a pound occasionally, for Mrs Weir, ma'am,' I said, 'but I would not undertake for more. The butter has been sent to Hove now for a good many years, but of course I could speak about it to Mrs Grant.'

'I shall call again, and speak for myself,' she exclaimed. 'I am not accustomed to incivility. My dear,' and she touched her husband with the driving-whip, 'my dear, are you ready? We must call again another day; or perhaps,—tell Mrs Grant I should wish to see her if she should be coming over to Compton in the course of the next week.'

I curtsied, and Mrs Temple drove off.

Was it not irritating?—and she professing herself to be so wonderfully good, so Christian-like. It would have made me doubt whether anything like real religion and humility were to be found in the world, if I had not known persons like Mrs Weir, and Mr and Mrs Richardson. Curiously enough, Mrs Temple always came over me as something new. It takes a long time to make one believe that persons with high professions can really be self-deceivers, and whenever I was away from Mrs Temple, I took myself to task for disliking her as I did, and suspected it might be my own fault that we were not friends. ‘Perhaps,’ I sometimes said to myself, ‘if I was more in earnest, I should enter more into her ways of going on, and understand them better.’ But it was no use to scold myself; one meeting was enough to make me turn from her as much as ever.

But the thing which worried me now far more than Mrs Temple’s ungraciousness, was the thought that Mrs Weir and Miss Milicent were so entirely under her influence, and that they could so have forgotten their old kindness for me, as to make such a great change as that of moving from the Heath to Stonecliff, and joining housekeeping with Mrs Temple, without troubling themselves to let me know that it was a settled plan. I dare say they had spoilt me in a measure in former days, and made me too much their friend; but I own I felt as though I had been dealt unkindly by, and my first impulse was to take my revenge by not helping them in return. Leah was little likely to upset the arrangements of her dairy, to please either Mrs Weir or Mrs Temple, and though I had said truly that the butter could be bought at Hove, I had a strong suspicion that it was nearly always caught up at once by old customers. But I was in a better mind than that before Leah came home. I had an old habit, I don’t remember exactly when or how I began it, of reading the Evening Psalms about that time in the day, and when I had put out the tea-things, I went up to my room and took out my prayer-book as usual, and somehow or other the very act of doing it made me feel what a sinful temper I was indulging. There was a hard struggle before I could overcome it, but God helped me, and I gained the victory, and that same evening I tried, though unsuccessfully, to persuade Leah to alter her market arrangements to suit them. I was vexed at having failed, but satisfied at having made the attempt, and never suspected that any fault could be laid at my door.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHRISTMAS came. It would take too much time to note all that happened before, though there was a good deal in different ways, both at home and abroad. Jane Shaw was married; that, I think, was the greatest event of all. Of course I was not asked to the wedding, but Jessie Lee was; and very pretty she looked, as I was told, and very much notice she had in consequence from Captain Price's gay friends. Her little head was sadly turned, for the time, by the flattery she received. She came over to us once or twice dressed so handsomely, that I really felt ashamed for her; but she took what I said to her about it very properly, and if she did not alter her ways, at least she was not angry with me for trying to induce her to do so. She was a great deal at Dene, which was what I disliked more than anything.

Mrs Morris and Leah quite changed their tone about her, when they found how much was made of her there. Instead of a drudge, they seemed resolved to turn her into a young lady; and to own the truth, she played the part better than many who set up for being well born and well bred. What kind of society there was at Dene I could not well understand. No one whom we knew, except Jessie, ever visited, or even went there, unless it might be now and then on business; but rumours reached us which were anything but satisfactory to me, though William and Leah appeared to think little enough about them.

Leah was possessed with the idea that I was jealous of Jessie; and so, if I ever made a remark upon anything I had heard, or repeated any of the stories which now and then came to my ears, I was only half believed. Leah could not see as I did that the very fact of having Jessie's name mixed up with people like Captain and Mrs Price, whom every one was talking about, was to her disadvantage. I relieved myself, when I was very much worried with this sort of thing, by writing it all out to Roger. I had always been accustomed to tell him every trouble as it arose; and I had no doubt of his taking part in this, for he never failed to mention Jessie in his letters, and to beg that I would remember him to her. Poor fellow! before Christmas came, he was beginning to be very homesick, for troubles had come upon the gentleman he was with, and so in a measure upon him. Yet he wrote cheerfully, and seemed quite resolved

to be brave and bear the hardships well, and in time he said there was no doubt that things would be brighter. At any rate, he might work independently whenever he chose. I tried not to see that he said less about having me with him. The possible idea of remaining away from him longer than a year was so dreadful, that I would not face it. I bore the worries of Sandcombe well enough in the hope of a speedy end, but I did not know what I should do if there was any prospect of their being a lasting burden. Taken separately, indeed, they were but trifles, but put together they were sometimes very heavy.

Busy times were the pleasantest. Leah was in good humour whenever she was roused to be very active; and one of the most peaceful seasons I ever remember whilst I was with her, was in November, when the whole house was at work for two days, salting meat and melting lard. It was all to be done at once, so there was no leisure for grumbling; and as it happened, Esther Smithson made herself remarkably useful, and was in consequence hired for extra work in the afternoon; and Leah even said to me that she thought I must have taken pains with her, for she was turning out a very handy girl. This pleased me, I own, for certainly I did take a good deal of pains with Esther in one way and another; and though she had some faults which it was very difficult to overcome, I could see that at any rate she had not gone back since she worked at Sandcombe.

My time and thoughts were occupied more and more every day with Sandcombe, and I dare say it was right that it should have been so, but there was a place in my heart still, which was filled with remembrances of Dene and care for Mrs Weir. How soon portions of one's life become like a dream to one! I was living scarcely more than a mile and a half from Mrs Weir, I heard her name constantly, there were opportunities for going over to see her tolerably often, yet by the time Christmas arrived I felt quite removed from her. The days when I used to be allowed to go and sit with her, and read to her, and nurse and comfort, and be useful to her, seemed like the days of my childhood, calm and bright, happy with an untold happiness, but too indistinct to give me the feeling that they had once formed part of my own existence.

Yet nothing had occurred outwardly to alter Mrs Weir's kindly feelings towards me, and I could not with truth say that they were altered; but she was living with Mrs Temple at

Stonecliff, and this put me always on my guard when I was with her, lest what I said should be repeated, and then taken up and turned against me. I was not so open, therefore, as I used to be, and no doubt Mrs Weir found it more difficult to talk to me. There was a kind of floating mist between us, and though I loved and honoured her too much ever really to alter in my feelings towards her, yet I confess it now vexed me to know that I was at Mrs Temple's mercy; and every now and then I could not help perceiving symptoms of distrust which went to my heart.

But there was one person who, I must say, never changed, nor showed the slightest symptom of change. Miss Milicent and I had lived together rather in the cat-and-dog style at Dene; but we liked each other at heart, and now that we were no longer in danger of mutual interference, I think we began to see more clearly our respective good points.

One thing I certainly did wonder at very much. I used to imagine Miss Milicent such a determined person; one whom it was impossible to lead, who would go her own way, and that often a very strange way. But I begin to think that people who are self-willed and troublesome in temper, are often as tired of their own humours and oddities as their friends can be; and as willing, but for their pride, to give way, if they meet with a will stronger than their own.

The day before Christmas-eve I was asked over to Longside. Mrs Kemp wished me to go the next evening, but there were reasons against it; one which concerned only myself. I wished to have a quiet time before Christmas-day. Mr Richardson had lately given some cautions and directions about preparing for Christmas, which I was desirous, if possible, to attend to, for I was beginning to be more careful not to neglect advice upon these points. Being so much alone tended to make me thoughtful. I always made a point of telling Leah what I meant to do in the way of going for a walk, or drinking tea with a friend; it was due to her, though she had no absolute control over me; but it was a sore trial sometimes; she had such a provoking way of suggesting difficulties. I often felt, when I had gained my point, as though I had been struggling through a furze bush and was pricked all over.

'Going to Longside!' she exclaimed, that day after dinner, when I happened to mention Mrs Kemp's invitation. 'Why, you'll be frozen! There must be snow before long.'

‘Not much appearance of it at present,’ I said; ‘the sky is clear.’

‘And you can’t set off till late, for I have kept Esther here to help this afternoon.’

‘I don’t quite see why that should prevent me,’ I replied.

‘Only that you know she always gets into a scrape, if you are not by to look after her. She and Martha never hit it off together.’

‘I am afraid they must learn to do so,’ I said. ‘I can scarcely undertake to be Esther’s guardian all day.’

‘Martha trusted her to wash the milk-buckets, and clean the pans, last time she stayed,’ continued Leah, ‘and she did it disgracefully. I shall be obliged to see to it myself next.’

‘I will give her a caution if you think it necessary,’ I replied; ‘but perhaps it would come better from you, as you are the mistress. I did not know, though, that it would be necessary to keep her, as there is not so very much to do.’

‘Really, Ursie, you are enough to try the temper of a saint,’ exclaimed Leah. ‘Not much to do! with all the dairy-work and the poultry, and tea, and supper, and the day after to-morrow Christmas-day!’

I tried not to smile, as I answered, ‘I did not think of putting you to inconvenience; my work, as you know, does not interfere much with yours in the afternoon.’

‘No, indeed, it doesn’t!’ exclaimed Leah; ‘you sit in the parlour with your needle till you have not the least idea of what is going on in the house. If you were mistress, as I am, you would soon see that it does not do to go gadding about the country whenever the fancy seizes one. Esther is not to be trusted with the dairy-work at all,’ she added, in an under-tone.

‘Well, then! let Martha undertake to scour the pans,’ I said, ‘and Esther can do something else.’

‘Martha has her hands full,’ replied Leah.

‘If you like,’ I said, ‘I can have an eye to the milk-buckets and the pans before I go. There is no difficulty in the matter, except Esther’s carelessness.’

‘I don’t know what difficulty you would have greater,’ observed Leah; ‘and it is nonsense of you, Ursie, to talk of waiting to look after her; why, you wouldn’t be off before dark; and how are you to come back again? You can’t think of bringing Farmer Kemp out at night to walk such a distance, and I am sure you ought not to come alone.’

'Mary said her father would not at all mind the walk,' I replied; 'and if it should be a bad night, he would drive me back.'

Leah made no reply, but just as she was going out of the room she turned round, and said, 'I wish you just to remember, Ursie, that if there are complaints about the milk and butter, it won't be my fault.'

I could have found it in my heart at the moment to give up my visit, anything seemed better than to have to bear these taunts, but I knew that I should gain nothing by yielding. Leah would only have called me perverse, and determined to make myself a martyr. I resolved, though, that she should have no real cause for complaint, and therefore I went to Esther, and took her myself into the dairy to show her exactly what she was to do, telling her especially that she was to give herself plenty of time, so as to have the pans quite ready for the new milk when it should be brought in. There really was nothing else of any consequence to be attended to, for as to the preparations for Christmas-day, I had been busy with them all the morning, and William was not so bountiful to his people as to require much to be done for them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LEAH kept out of my way, and did not say good-bye to me. I went off with a mixed feeling,—a light heart from the prospect of my holiday, but a heavy one from the thought of the constant fret of temper which I was to bear,—no one could say how long. The light-heartedness, however, won the day by the time I had reached the top of the Down, and could look over the sea, with the white waves curling and tossing as they rushed in upon the shore. I stood for a few moments to enjoy the sight, and then finding I had more time than I expected, I took it into my head to go to the summit of St Anne's Hill, and stand by the ruined oratory, as I had done on that evening when Roger first told me that we might be parted. I went up so quickly that I was quite out of breath, and when I reached the tower, I rested against the wall to recover myself. I did not know that any one was near till I heard a little cough, and when I looked round the corner I saw Jessie Lee.

Like myself, she was leaning against the tower with an open letter in her hand, which she was trying to read; but the wind caught it every instant, so that she could scarcely manage it. 'You had better come round this side, and not face the wind in that way, Jessie,' I said, gently, not wishing to startle her.

But she did start, and stand up, and the colour came to her cheeks and mounted up to her forehead, while she crumpled up the letter in her hand, and tried to hide it.

'I didn't mean to frighten you,' I said; 'but I was going to Longside, when the fancy took me to run up here for a few minutes and look round. The air on St Anne's always does one good.'

'Yes, it is very fresh. I didn't know you were going to Longside. I think I must say good-bye;' and Jessie moved away.

But I called after her. 'Don't run off in such a hurry,' I said, as she came back; 'it is not often that we meet now, Jessie; you are always gay or busy.'

'Sometimes; I am not busy now,' she answered, stopping unwillingly.

'Only gay?' I said.

The words seemed to strike her like a mockery; she turned round upon me quite sharply. 'You didn't use to be fond of sneering, Ursie.'

'I never meant to sneer, Jessie,' I replied; 'I only repeat what others say.'

'And I thought you knew better than to believe the world's talk,' she answered. 'No one can call Hatton a gay place.'

'Not Hatton but Dene,' I said. 'You must own, Jessie, that Captain and Mrs Price keep open house.'

'It is their concern, not mine,' she answered; 'why should people talk about me?'

She spoke hastily; but I suspect she was not entirely vexed that people should talk of her, in whatever way it might be.

'We must live in the desert, if we mean not to be talked about in this world,' I said; 'and even then I suppose people would be troubling themselves to guess why we went there.'

'And that is why I wonder you take any heed to what you hear about me, Ursie,' continued Jessie; 'you know so well how foolish it all is.'

'I am not quite so sure of that,' I said, gravely. 'I don't think, Jessie, that any girl's name is ever mentioned lightly,

unless she herself has given cause for it ; at least, that is what Mrs Kemp has often said to me, and Roger used to tell me the same.'

Jessie stood with one foot forward, wishing, I could see, to run away from me, but at the mention of Roger's name she drew it back, and her fingers seemed to grasp more firmly the letter which she held.

'Roger wasn't well when you last heard from him, was he?' she said in a careless tone.

'Not very ; the cold tries him. I must go out to him as soon as I can to take care of him.'

'He will want that,' she said.

'Yes ; he takes very little thought for himself.'

'But he likes Canada?' continued Jessie.

'Yes, in a way ; it will never be like England to him ; he cares so much for his old friends.'

Jessie looked up thoughtfully. 'You tell him all the gossip about them, I suppose, Ursie.'

'I tell him what I hear ; sometimes truth, sometimes gossip, just as it may happen.'

'And he believes it, of course?'

'He believes what I tell him is true.'

'And if people say ill-natured things about me, he takes them for fact then,' said Jessie.

'He takes for fact what I say is fact,' I replied ; 'that Jessie Lee is too much at Dene for her happiness or for her good name.'

'My good name!' she exclaimed ; and her eyes, usually so sweet and soft in their expression, flashed like lightning. 'I tell you what you may say to him, which will put a stop to any remarks upon my good name or my bad.'

She waited a moment,—began to speak, stopped, and at length exclaimed, 'Jessie Lee is going to be married ;' and, seeing, I suppose, that I looked rather incredulous, she thrust her letter into my hand, saying, impatiently, 'Read it ; read it.'

I turned away from the wind, and opened the letter ; Jessie watched me intently.

The handwriting was difficult to decipher ; she thought I had reached the conclusion before I had made out the meaning of the first four lines.

'Well!' she said, 'it's all true,—plain ; no mistake, Ursie.' Still I read on ; when at length I came to the concluding words,

I folded up the paper again, and gave it to Jessie without speaking.

‘You see,’ she said, ‘it is an offer.’

‘Yes! an offer.’

‘And a very proper one. I shall be the wife of Lieutenant Macdonald, of the Marines. Roger will have nothing to say against that.’

The tone of her voice was strange; there was more pique than pleasure in it. I thought I would try an experiment with her.

‘No, Jessie,’ I said, ‘you will not be Mrs Macdonald.’

‘Why not? Who is to hinder me?’

‘Yourself. You don’t know anything about Lieutenant Macdonald that is good, and what is more, you don’t care for him.’

‘As for caring, he is very polite; you can’t find fault with his letter.’

‘Yes, I can,’ I said. ‘It is the letter of a man who has not a particle of respect for you, and thinks he has nothing to do but to flatter you; and, Jessie, you know as well as I do, that Lieutenant Macdonald’s habits would make any woman miserable. Who would marry a drunkard?’

‘You may just tell Roger that it is going to be,’ she said, laughing. ‘It will be a fine subject for your next letter.’

I was provoked more than frightened. With all her folly, I believed that Jessie had too much real respect for goodness, thus deliberately to throw herself away; but then her vanity,—it was such a fearful stumbling-block. I could not let her leave me in this wild mood.

‘Jessie,’ I said, and I caught hold of her dress, and made her listen to me. ‘You were always fond of teasing, but this goes rather beyond what one can bear. You can’t mean really to say “Yes” to this man; but you will do a very wrong thing if you don’t at once say “No.”’

‘I don’t know why I should,’ she replied. ‘You see, he says that if I cannot at once like him, he will be content to wait for what time may do.’

‘And for what purpose?’ I inquired. ‘Do you think he is going to reform for the love of you?’

‘He may,’ said Jessie. ‘Men do reform sometimes.’

‘But women are worse than mad who marry upon the chance of reformation,’ I said. ‘Jessie, even if you cared for him, there is not one of your friends who would consent to the marriage.’

'I don't want consent,' she replied, 'at least, not yet; there is no hurry.'

'Indeed, Jessie,' I exclaimed, 'you are mistaken. There is no halting between yes and no in a case like this. If you don't mean to marry him, you have no business to keep him hanging on.'

'I don't say that I shall not marry him,' she replied.

'Well, then, you will talk to Mrs Morris, and Leah, and your friends, and if they approve, you will say "Yes."'

'Perhaps "Yes," perhaps "No." I can't answer for what I may do.'

She provoked me so that I jumped up, and spoke, I am afraid, hastily: 'Jessie,' I said, 'this is wicked trifling. People talk lightly of love and marriage, but they are very serious matters, and we shall have to answer before God for the way in which we manage them. If Lieutenant Macdonald was a man whom you could respect, I could understand your hesitation. But he is a drunkard; his character is notorious. You know you have told me about him many times.'

'He says he is very fond of me,' said Jessie; and there was more real feeling in her tone than I could have imagined possible in connection with such a man.

I saw at once what was working in her mind. 'Jessie,' I said, gravely, 'what is the love of a bad man worth?'

'Nothing, nothing; only, Ursie, it is very pleasant to be loved.'

All the flippancy and perverseness of her manner had vanished, and she leaned her head upon my shoulder and cried bitterly. I thought of Longside, and felt I should be late, but what could I do? 'Dear Jessie,' I said, 'it is very pleasant to be loved, there is no doubt of that, it is what we all long for. But love alone won't make you happy, and, what is more, such love as this won't last. Lieutenant Macdonald may possibly think he cares for you much, but I am quite sure that he cares for himself more. He won't give up his wine and his bad companions to please you.'

'Perhaps he will, if I ask him,' persisted Jessie.

'But you have no right to ask him, unless you mean to do something for him in return; unless you have made up your mind to marry him, and that, you know, you have not. And, at all events, one thing is clear; you are bound to be open with Mrs Morris in the matter, and to do nothing without consulting her.'

Jessie stood twisting the letter into various shapes. Presently she said, rather bitterly, 'You are not lonely as I am, Ursie.'

'Not quite, I have Roger; but he is away.'

'That is nothing; he thinks of you more than of any one else; he loves you best.'

Why was it that a creeping misgiving seemed to glide through my veins, and chill my answer? I merely said, 'Yes, I suppose he does.'

'Suppose! you know it, you are sure of it,' exclaimed Jessie, eagerly. 'If I had a love like Roger's Ursie, I could go through the world without a wish. I would work, slave, bear torture, anything to be loved first—best.'

'But not by Lieutenant Macdonald,' I said. 'A drunkard! O Jessie, think!' and I myself shuddered unconsciously at the idea.

She put her arm within mine without saying another word, and we moved away from the tower. Then she stopped, and said, 'Which way are you going, Ursie?'

'Over the hill, to Longside. I ought to have been there half an hour ago.'

'We can walk together, then, and you can go through Dene; no one will notice.'

'Not together,' I replied, 'if you are bound for Hatton.'

'I must go to Dene first,' she answered with some hesitation; 'I promised Mrs Price to see her to-day.'

'It would be better to write to Mr Macdonald first,' I said. 'If he is at Dene, as I suppose, it will be awkward meeting him before you have written.'

'He is not likely to be there. The gentlemen were all to be out shooting. That is why I promised to go. I must keep my word. Now, give me your hand and we'll run;' and she drew me with her to the brow of the hill.

CHAPTER XXXV.

I WOULD not run down St Anne's Hill, for it was a great deal too steep to be safe, and Jessie knew better than to attempt it; but she was in such a state of excitement, that really she scarcely

knew what she said. When we reached the foot of the hill, I again urged her returning to Hatton. As to going through Dene myself, I did not like the idea, for my acquaintance with Mrs Price had dropped since her marriage, and I did not desire to renew it, neither did I know how she was likely to look upon such an intrusion. Jessie could not understand my scruples. She was so at home at Dene herself, and she fancied every one else must be the same.

We went on in the direction of Dene, neither of us having quite made up our minds what to do, and I trying to persuade Jessie that it was more fitting for her at once to go back to Hatton, and put the case before Mrs Morris, when, as we reached the little sheep-path leading off the down to Compton, who should we see coming up but Miss Milicent, dressed in a kind of loose greatcoat and a close beaver bonnet, and helping herself to mount the hill by the aid of a heavy stick.

'Ursie Grant, is that you?' she called out. 'Stop, will you? I want you.'

She came up looking flushed and excited, but somewhat cautious, as she saw Jessie.

'I thought you were alone,' she said, in a tone which Jessie could scarcely help hearing, and which made her stand aside for a few seconds, and then, to my great annoyance, walk on slowly by herself towards Dene. I called out after her, 'Just wait, Jessie; I shall not be a minute.'

'Yes, you will be, I have a good many things to say to you,' said Miss Milicent. 'Who is that girl?'

'A kind of cousin of my sister-in-law, Miss Milicent,' I replied. 'If you will excuse me, I must not let her walk alone.'

'Why not? She is no baby. Where is she going?'

'I am not quite sure; perhaps to Dene?'

'To Dene! That is just where I am going, and you are going with me.'

'Indeed, Miss Milicent, I don't know,' I said, taken quite by surprise. 'I will walk with you to the gate; but I can't say about going in.'

'It is going in that I am bent upon. I have a great deal to say to you, Ursie Grant. 'Can't that girl walk on instead of waiting? She is a very pretty girl. I like her face.'

It was a face to like, especially at that moment. There was so much thoughtfulness in it. I could see that Jessie was having a struggle with herself. She was almost determined to go back

to Hatton. If we had but been alone, I should have persuaded her.

‘That is your way,’ I said to her, laughingly, yet in a tone I knew she must understand, and I pointed to Hatton.

‘And this is our way to Dene,’ said Miss Milicent, leading me to the beginning of the sloping green pathway on the side of the down. ‘I am not going there to pay a visit—only on business, and you can let Mrs Price understand this.’

Jessie caught the word Dene. ‘Then you are going to Dene, Ursie,’ she said.

‘Ursie Grant and I are both going there,’ said Miss Milicent. ‘She knows Mrs Price, and I don’t; though I have had dealings enough with her of one kind and another.’

‘I knew Jane Shaw; I don’t know Mrs Price,’ I replied. ‘She is too fine a lady for me, Miss Milicent; and, indeed, she will be likely to receive you much better without me.’

‘I know Mrs Price very well,’ said Jessie, with scarcely concealed satisfaction at having what she considered a grand friend.

‘Do you? Then you will be just the person to say what I want,’ said Miss Milicent; ‘only you will just let Ursie Grant and me walk aside and have a little talk together.’

I was most unfortunate. My first impulse was to leave Jessie and Miss Milicent to manage their visit if they could, and make my way at once to Longside; but then I was so afraid to trust Jessie alone, knowing how easily she might be persuaded to stay and see Mr Macdonald again; and even if her present intentions were good, which I was not sure of, I could not for a moment have depended upon them, if she were placed in the way of temptation. Care for him she did not, but she might be flattered by his admiration, and touched by his expressions of affection; and how many women marry, and make themselves miserable for life, under no greater inducement!

Miss Milicent took no notice of my hesitation, but telling Jessie to go on to the white gate, and wait for us, she planted herself deliberately in my way, and said, in an under-tone, ‘We have had news of my father, Ursie.’

‘Indeed!’ I exclaimed. I must have changed colour from surprise, for Miss Milicent added directly, ‘You look as white as my mother did. She shook like an aspen leaf, and almost went into a fit. She would have gone quite, if Matilda Temple had not scolded her.’

'O Miss Milicent! scolded her!' I exclaimed; 'who could do that? Poor lady! no wonder she was upset.'

'No wonder, indeed. If you had been there to see it! We had such a scene! But Matilda Temple didn't carry the day, though she tried hard for it. She would have kept the letter from my mother if she could.'

'And you have heard from Mr Weir himself?' I said.

'No, only from a gentleman abroad who has seen him, and knows where he is, and tells us that if we want to hear more of him we must find out a Lieutenant Macdonald. He is at Dene, Ursie, and that is why I am going there.'

It was a most incoherent story. I could make nothing of it, and I had to ask many questions before I found out the whole. John Hervey, it seems, had been doing for Mrs Weir what he wished me to do; he had been keeping his eyes and ears open for anything which might interest or be of use to her. It was through some acquaintance of his that a rumour came of Mr Weir having been seen somewhere in France—in Paris, I think it was. John said nothing, but he made inquiries, and at length he found out an English gentleman who had lately been in company with Mr Weir, but knew nothing of his history, or how he was living, or what he meant to do—only that he had with him a Lieutenant Macdonald, who, at that time, was upon the point of starting for England. 'Mr Hervey is clever enough,' continued Miss Milicent, when she had reached thus far; 'and he put two and two together, and made out at last that the Lieutenant Macdonald mentioned in the letter was the same who is now at Dene; whereupon he wrote to me to tell me,—a very civil letter it was; not at all putting himself forward; he is a young man, who knows his place, and does not interfere. But when I had read it, I made up my mind I would just go over to Dene myself, and see Lieutenant Macdonald, and hear all he has to say. I may as well take in some fresh air for strength before,' she added, as she turned round to the wind, thrust her hands into her coat-pockets, and opening her mouth, drew a long breath, as much I am sure to help her mind as her body.

I did not dare say I felt for her. She never would have borne that, so I remarked quite coldly, 'It would be more proper for Lieutenant Macdonald to call upon you, Miss Milicent. No doubt he would be quite willing to give himself the trouble.'

'I don't know what is proper or what is not, Ursie Grant. I

have lived long enough, and seen folly enough, to put propriety out of the question.'

'But it would have been easier for you to have seen him at Stonecliff,' I observed. 'There are such odd people sometimes at Dene.'

'If they are odd they are more like myself,' she replied; 'and I'll tell you what, Ursie, you don't know anything about it. There is Matilda Temple at Stonecliff, with eyes and ears in every corner of the house; and my mother's door locked against me and open only to her. No! whatever I learn shall be by myself, without her interference.'

'Of course you know best, Miss Milicent,' I replied, 'but it would not seem to me that Mrs Temple was likely to interfere in anything which concerned Mrs Weir; she could have no object in it.'

'Then you don't know her, Ursie, and you are an innocent baby, which I never thought you before, for you never gave a truer warning than when you said we had better not make one with Matilda Temple.'

'It was you who thought so first, Miss Milicent,' I said. 'You always told me you distrusted her.'

'And so I did, and so I do. How I ever came to give way to her I can't think. I do believe, Ursie, we don't any of us know in the least what we are like.'

There was more thought in the remark than I quite saw then. I answered, indifferently, 'I suppose we can't know till we are tried. But things won't last long as they are, Miss Milicent. I think you told me one day, that Stonecliff was only taken for a year.'

'And what is to happen to us before the year is over? It is only just begun, and if we go on at the rate we are going now, we may be without a penny before it is ended.'

I felt uncomfortable when Miss Milicent said this. I did not think I was the person to hear about the money affairs of the family, but Miss Milicent was so strange; she could be as close as possible at times, but if the impulse once seized her, and she felt confidence in the person to whom she was talking, everything came out at a rush. I looked towards the white gate to give her a hint that we must hasten on, but she never took hints.

'We were to share housekeeping,' she continued, 'but—I don't know how it is, I am sure—I have no means of ordering matters,

and there are so many little things put down to my mother. I don't believe she wants them, but Matilda says she does. Matilda boasts she keeps within her own income; if she does it must be by eking it out with ours.'

'Perhaps,' I ventured to say, 'if there is news of Mr Weir, it might be the occasion of making a change.'

'I don't say perhaps,' she replied. 'I say it must be; only Matilda Temple will work, and work, at my mother to prevent it. Now she has her in her hands, she won't let her go easily, you may depend upon that. That was why she wanted me not to show Mr Hervey's letter. It was all pretence saying it would upset my mother. We had a regular battle about it, and I told her a bit of my mind. We are not the better friends for that. Depend upon it, Ursie, it is a trying life we have of it;' and for almost the first time since I had known her, I heard Miss Milicent sigh.

It was her own doing, all to be attributed to her neglect of her mother, which had paved the way for Mrs Temple's influence, but it was not my place to reproach her with it; and I fancied she was beginning to feel it.

'Mr Richardson talks to me about looking after my mother,' she continued; 'he is always throwing me back when I want him to give me more parish work. I don't see what business he has to interfere. As I tell him, he can't know the ins and outs of a family. My mother wouldn't have me with her if I wished it.'

'I am sure Mr Richardson means kindly,' I remarked, 'whatever he may say. He has been a good friend to Roger and me, at least.'

'Well, of course, yes! and I dare say I may be wrong, but that won't mend matters now; and, Ursie, I don't like your always taking side against me.'

I only laughed a little; there was no good in arguing with her or contradicting her. Besides, time was getting on. The sun was sinking low, and already there was a yellow gleam over the bay, and a mist gathering behind the white cliffs.

'If you please, Miss Milicent,' I said, 'we really must be going on. Jessie has to return to Hatton, and you will find it lonely walking back to the Heath. Are you quite sure you had not better wait, and call at Dene to-morrow?'

'I am quite sure that, if it must be night before I am back, I will see that Mr Macdonald to-day,' she exclaimed. 'Since you

are like the rest of the world, Ursie, you can go your own way. That young girl and I can manage without you.'

She strode on for some distance, and had nearly reached the white gate, when she stopped, turned round to me as I was following her, caught hold of my hand, and grasped it with a firm clutch, I can call it nothing else, which was peculiar to her, and said, 'I am like a hack-horse tired, Ursie. Every one is setting at me to go their way, but you will forgive.'

She would not wait to hear what I had to say in answer, but pushing open the gate before Jessie could do it for her, she entered the grounds of Dene.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DENE was very little altered. I could not tell whether I was more glad or sorry for that. It would have been a great pain to see the old familiar walks destroyed; but then to look upon them with such changed associations! I wondered how Miss Milicent could bear it. She went on bravely, and, as it seemed, carelessly, only I don't think she allowed herself to look about much; and she did not speak a word, but walked before us by herself.

Jessie, pleased to show her intimacy, said she should run round by the verandah, and tell Mrs Price we were coming. Miss Milicent and I went to the carriage entrance.

A footman, in very gay orange-coloured livery, opened the door, but he was almost immediately followed by Jessie. I thought she was going to put herself forward to welcome us, but she had better tact than people would have given her credit for, knowing her thoughtless ways. She came up to Miss Milicent, and said, 'I thought, ma'am, perhaps you would like to know that Mrs Price has a visitor with her.'

'Thank you; I shall not keep Mrs Price more than a minute. Ursie, where are you going?' and Miss Milicent looked back after me.

'If you have private business with Mrs Price, Miss Milicent, I could wait here very well,' I said in an undertone.

'Private, with her!' was the answer, in a loud whisper. 'You know I am not come to see her.'

'You had better let your mistress know that Miss Weir would be glad to speak to her,' I said aloud to the servant, for I was resolved that Mrs Price should not think I had called upon her for my own pleasure.

'The dining-room is empty, I am sure,' said Jessie to me ; and the man took the hint and ushered us in. I can't say how uncomfortable I felt ; it was so very awkward to be there, and I could not see why Miss Milicent had insisted upon it ; only I suppose she disliked the visit, and thought that I should help to make it go off well.

Jessie was very nervous and excited. She went out into the passage to see if the visitor was going,—then came back and stood at the door,—then looked out of the window. Her eyes were constantly turning from one side to the other, and every little noise made her start. For myself, I was really thankful to have my thoughts occupied by her and Miss Milicent. To sit in the dining-room at Dene, and feel myself a visitor to Jane Shaw, would have been more than I could have borne patiently, if I had had leisure to think of it. Presently there was a loud talking in the passage, some very hearty good-byes were exchanged, and then the dining-room door was thrown open very wide, and Jane Shaw,—I beg her pardon, Mrs Price,—in a splendid figured green silk, rustling with stiff lining and flounces, sailed into the room. As for being introduced, there was no need of that ; she was at home with us directly.

'Good afternoon, Miss Weir ; very glad to see you. Mrs Weir is pretty well, I hope ? How d'ye do, Ursula ?'

She was not the least altered. In spite of her handsome dress—her hair beautifully plaited according to the newest fashion—her rings, and chains, and bracelets—she was Jane Shaw still. Little Jessie Lee was ten times more attractive, and Miss Milicent in her rough coat and beaver bonnet much more like a lady.

Miss Milicent's reply was abrupt, as might be expected from her, but there was a curious kind of civility in the tone which I was not used to—it seemed to throw one at a distance. I wondered whether Jane felt it.

'My mother is as well as usual, thank you. I ought not to have come so late ; I must beg you to excuse it, but I have business with a gentleman staying here.'

'A gentleman, indeed ? We have a good many gentlemen here, haven't we, Jessie ?' The poor child coloured crimson.

‘I wish to see Mr Macdonald,’ continued Miss Milicent. ‘If he is in the house, perhaps you would let him be told that I am here?’

‘Lieutenant Macdonald! I can’t say. He went out this morning. He may be returned. The gentlemen are not to be reckoned upon in this shooting season, as Jessie knows,’ she added in a familiar tone. ‘Perhaps, dear, you would just see if the lieutenant is in the book-room?’

I rose and looked into the library myself. A man dressed in a shooting-jacket was lying full length upon a sofa. His face was handsome, but the expression very disagreeable. It was Lieutenant Macdonald; I just knew him by sight, and Jessie Lee in contrast with him seemed to me like an angel.

‘Mr Macdonald is there, I think, Miss Milicent,’ I said, as I drew back from the door; ‘would you wish to go in?’ and I made room for her to pass, yet in such a way as to prevent Jessie from being seen. Mrs Price followed to introduce her.

I closed the door behind them, and we heard only the low murmur of voices.

Then I went up to Jessie. ‘Promise me one thing,’ I said, hurriedly, ‘that you won’t stay here, Jessie; that you will come home to Sandcombe with me.’

She hesitated. ‘You must,’ I continued; ‘you don’t know what you may be led into.’

Mrs Price’s hand touched the handle of the door—I was in an agony for the answer—I don’t know what possessed me, but I added, ‘What shall I be able to say of you to Roger?’

Jessie’s countenance changed in an instant. She looked at me with a winning smile, and said, ‘I will do what you wish. I should not like to vex Mr Roger.’

I kissed her. She seemed to me like a child saved from danger. Immediately afterwards Mrs Price burst in upon us. She could not have understood how or why I was there; indeed, I should have had a difficulty in explaining it myself. But she was very gracious; most unpleasantly so. ‘You find the place altered since you were here, Ursula,’ she began. ‘We have just added a room to your cottage, and enlarged the billiard room; you had a small parlour, I think, and the kitchen. I dare say you would like to go over and see it, and you would like to see the drawing-room, too, no doubt—Captain Price has put up some pictures, and made it look quite different from what it was in poor Mrs Weir’s time. Our groom lives in your cottage; it

just does for him and his wife, and they have one child. I will show you the way, if you like it. Jessie, dear, if you'll just run up to my room, and fetch my shawl—not the silk one, but the cashmere—I shall be obliged to you.'

Jessie looked proud of the commission, and hurried away, whilst Mrs Price took me into her drawing-room, professing to show me the pictures, but pointing out also the new carpet, and curtains, and tables, and chairs, everything in fact which could in the least display her wealth, and continually repeating, 'We have been obliged to make such changes. The old furniture did well enough for poor Mrs Weir, I dare say; but it wouldn't suit us.'

I could never have been very cordial to her under any circumstances, and now every word she said jarred upon me, and presently, when she began to talk of Jessie, I was more than jarred, I was provoked. 'Jessie was such a sweet girl,' she said, 'she was quite glad to have the chance of being useful to her. They saw a good deal of company, and Jessie had many admirers. When she was well dressed, there wasn't a prettier girl anywhere round the country. No doubt she would marry well.'

I made but a short answer; if I had said all that was in my mind, she might have thought me jealous; but looking out of the window, I observed, that 'we must be thinking of going; Miss Milicent seemed likely to be kept some time, and though we had walked over to Dene together, we were to return separately. Miss Milicent had asked me to come with her, because she was a stranger.'

'Oh! indeed! I didn't understand. I wasn't aware why I had the honour of a visit.' Mrs Price's manner was peculiar. I could not tell whether she felt pleased or displeased at having the acquaintance renewed. Jessie brought down the shawl, and we went over to the cottage. Mrs Price reminded me again how small it was, and only fit for the groom, and tried to impress upon me that she was a great lady, and I was no lady at all; and yet she asked me questions about Sandcombe, and every now and then hinted that of course I should come and see her again. I let her talk as she liked, not professing to be equal to her in worldly position; it did not distress me to be put down by her, my only difficulty was to keep myself from looking down upon her for other causes. But that which was more in my thoughts than anything else was, what could be done with Jessie. If she were to go with me to Longside she would be in the way; but I did not choose to let her walk to Hatton alone, and still less

could I bear to leave her at Dene. It seemed to me as though she had been providentially placed under my care, and that I was responsible for her. I could not tell what to decide. We went into the cottage, and spoke to the groom's wife, and I looked round upon the old familiar walls with an eye that in fact saw nothing. I could have sat there for hours and thought, if I had been alone, but I had no feeling whilst Jane Price was at my side. Only for one moment, whilst she, and Jessie, and the woman were talking apart, the present seemed to vanish away like a mist, and the past was all before me. Roger in his arm-chair, the table set out for tea, the kettle standing on the hearth, so cheerful, so peaceful!—Oh, what a pang shot through me! Would such days ever return again?

Miss Milicent came out of the house just as we were returning to it. A burning spot flushed her cheek, and she rushed up to me. 'We will go now, Ursie; are you ready? Mrs Price, I am sorry to have interrupted you,' and Miss Milicent made a wonderfully polite bend. 'I wish you good evening.'

The words were not thoroughly articulate, they came out so fast, and Miss Milicent hurried on up the hill, whilst I vainly tried to overtake her, and then looked back, and to my dismay saw Lieutenant Macdonald issue from the house and join Mrs Price and Jessie. I returned to them directly, but not before a few words had been interchanged between Jessie and Mr Macdonald. 'Please be quick, Jessie,' I said, 'Miss Milicent is gone.'

Jessie looked at me half doubtful, half frightened.

'Come,' I repeated, decidedly. 'I must follow Miss Milicent.'

'You were not going with her; I don't know what you mean,' replied Jessie; and Mrs Price turned upon me hastily, and said that Jessie was intending to stay with her.

'You promised, Jessie,' I said.

'Promised what? She is engaged to me,' exclaimed Mrs Price. She began, I am sure, to suspect my motive for interference.

Mr Macdonald had withdrawn a few paces, and I took care that he should not have the opportunity of addressing Jessie again, though what she had already said had been, evidently, in no way pleasing to him. Jessie herself seemed so irresolute, that once more I was induced to use the weapon of persuasion which I had tried successfully.

'You know, Jessie,' I said, 'you told me that you did not

wish to vex me nor any one else.' I stressed the last words, and saw that she understood them. She made a confused excuse to Mrs Price, a half curtsy to the lieutenant, and we followed Miss Milicent up the hill.

I breathed freely when I found myself outside the white gate; yet the relief only lasted for a few moments. I felt so provoked with Jessie for her weakness; so annoyed at having my engagement for the evening interfered with; so anxious too for Miss Milicent, who was still striding on at a man's pace before us.

I kept Jessie's arm within mine, but without talking to her. Really I did not know what to say. After a few moments I looked at her, and saw she was crying. My heart softened towards her then; I said, gently, 'You are not sorry you kept your promise, Jessie, are you?'

The tears only came the faster for the inquiry. I repeated it.

'I didn't keep it,' she exclaimed. 'I can't keep anything or do anything that's right, Ursie; you had better tell Mr Roger so at once, and then he will give me up as good for nothing.'

Her thoughts were dwelling then upon Roger. I noticed it, but it did not strike me as unsafe or unwise. It was like the feeling of a child for a parent.

'Neither Roger nor I will give you up, Jessie,' I said, 'not for all the world. But if you don't want to run the risk of making yourself miserable for life, you must keep out of the way of temptation. Dene is not a fit place for you. Jane Shaw wasn't over careful in her conduct as a girl, and she is not any better, that I can hear, now that she is married; she has very few women friends, and the men are a bad set, as you quite well know, and it would just be ruin to you in all ways to be mixed up with them.'

I waited for her to assent, but she only said, after a moment's pause, 'Then Mr Roger wouldn't like to see me married.'

'Yes, he would like it very much,' I answered, 'if you were to marry respectably; so would all who care for you.'

'I don't believe that any one who is respectable, as you call it, will ever take up with me,' exclaimed Jessie. 'If Mr Roger thinks I have a bad name, so will others.'

She longed for me to contradict her, I am sure, but I would not do so just then. She was out of conceit with herself, and wished me to say something civil that might put her in again; but though I was very sorry for her, I was certain it was good for her to feel that her careless ways had done her harm in

people's opinion. Besides, I had no wish to go on talking about Roger. I felt I had not been wise in saying as much as I had about him. Jessie was so fond of being thought about, even in the way of being scolded, that it only increased her vanity to remind her that any one was anxious about her, especially a person whom she so much respected and looked up to as Roger. I cut the conversation short by saying that I must run on and have a few words with Miss Milicent. That, however, was not so easily accomplished. Miss Milicent had walked on so fast that I could not overtake her, and when I began to consider, though I thought it very strange in her to go off from me in such a sudden way, I saw it was no business of mine to thrust myself upon her. Instead of following her, therefore, I came back to Jessie, and proposed that we should both make the best of our way to Sandcombe. How disappointed I felt at losing my visit to Longside I can't say; and I thought how they would be expecting me, and once or twice was sorely tempted to go there after all; but it would never have done to take Jessie; it would quite have cut up our evening. If I had wished to have any talk with Mary, I must have left Jessie alone, or burdened Mrs Kemp with her, and that I should have disliked extremely, for she was not over pleased, as I well knew, with the character that Jessie had gained for herself. One has no right to put people together till one is tolerably sure they are willing to be friends.

Moreover, it was not a fixed engagement at Longside. I was always obliged to say I would come if I could, but they must not expect me for certain. I could never answer for what might happen with Leah to detain me at home.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STORM of hail came on just when we were off the down, which made me the more glad that I had decided to return. It had been gathering for some time, but I had not noticed it much, having my mind given to other things. It would have drenched us thoroughly long before we could have reached Longside, and I should have been sorry for this more for Jessie's sake than my own. I was strong, and able to bear all weathers; but Jessie was of a weak constitution, and often taking cold.

'They will be just sitting down to tea, Jessie,' I said, as I took her up-stairs to my room, that she might leave her bonnet and shawl there; 'they will be surprised to see us.'

Jessie was disinclined to go down; she looked pale and tired, and proposed to wait where she was till the hail was over, and then walk on to Hatton. But this I would not hear of. She could sleep, I said, very well in my bed; and one of the farm boys who lived at Hatton would carry a message to say where she was. 'I am sure, Jessie,' I added, 'that whenever you are at Dene, Mrs Morris doesn't expect you back till she sees you, and so she won't be in any fright about you, knowing that you set off with the intention of walking there.'

Jessie blushed, but made no answer; and a fear crossed my mind, that perhaps she was in the habit of paying visits to Dene oftener than her friends knew. I could not bear to think it of her, for she was true by nature, though sometimes inclined to keep things back from fear. But vanity and love of amusement will lead to so much evil, which no one has any idea of at first.

I left her to go and explain to Leah why I had returned; but when I entered the parlour I found no tea prepared,—not even the tea-tray put out,—and the room looked so cheerless! The fire had gone out, and some one had been trying to re-light it; for a few sticks were lying about, and the coal-scuttle stood in the middle of the room. I went to the kitchen, and found no one, but I heard voices in the distance, loud and angry; they came, I was nearly sure, from the dairy, and I went there to see what was going on.

It was so dark that I stumbled over something which was lying on the ground at the door; it was like part of a broken dish, and my foot went into a pool, whether of milk or of water I could not see. Leah and Esther were in the dairy. They did not perceive me; Leah was in what I can only call a towering passion, a thing rare for her; she was bitter and cross, but not generally passionate. I heard my name mentioned. 'Miss Grant lets you do it, does she? You are not to attend to Miss Grant, you are to attend to me, I am your mistress. But you'll leave me; I don't keep good-for-nothing girls, who tell lies!' And then Esther rejoined, not very respectfully but very earnestly, denying that she had said anything which was untrue; and was immediately contradicted by Leah with fresh threats of being turned off instantly. What was the beginning or likely to be the end of the quarrel, I could not see; but I was quite sure

that Esther had been kept at work later than was right, and that she would have a long, dark walk over the hill by herself, if some one did not take thought for her; so I quietly drew back, and made my way into the farm-yard, and told Sam Hobson, Kitty's father, whom I knew I should find at work there, that he was not to go without having a word with me first. He was a steady man, and lived near the Smithsons, and I was sure he would see Esther safe home. Then I went back to the dairy. Leah had left it, but I found Esther sobbing at the door. She told me her grievance. She had washed the milk buckets carefully, as I ordered her, and cleaned the ladles, and prepared everything for the milk when it was brought in; and she was going to scour the pans that would be wanted the next morning, when she was called away by Martha, and sent on a message across the fields, which took her more than a quarter of an hour. When she came back she found some milk, which had been put into a brown pan, spilt, and the pan itself broken to pieces. She had no more to do with it, she said, than I had; and she went directly and told Martha, but Martha didn't believe her, neither did Mrs Grant. No one else, they said, had been near the dairy, and it must have been her doing; and so they wanted to make her confess it. 'But I wouldn't tell a story for them, nor for the Queen!' exclaimed Esther, indignantly. 'I didn't do it, and if they were to cut my head off, I wouldn't say that I did.'

There was one point, however, in which Esther no doubt was wrong; it was part of her usual carelessness; she had been always told to shut the dairy door when she came out, and this had been forgotten. But she owned it at once. She was a thoughtless girl, but not given to falsehood. I had no doubt myself that the mischief was done by the cat, and I made her fetch a candle, and we went into the dairy together. I pointed out the marks of the creature's feet on the boards; Esther was satisfied then, she thought the trouble was over. As for the threatening and the scolding, she had been used to them from one or the other all her life, and I doubt if she considered it possible to get on without them. She had learned to look upon herself as fated to do wrong. As she once said to me, 'Please, Miss Grant, I was born to go crooked.'

I was very provoked with Leah in my own mind for having raised such a storm, without having given herself the trouble of inquiring into the case, but I supposed it would all be right when once I had explained matters. I did not understand Leah,

however ; perhaps I should more truly say I did not understand human nature. There is no saying how far we are all at times tempted to depart from what is just, from the shame of allowing that we have been unjust. When I went in, Leah was kneeling down before the parlour fire trying to re-light it. Esther had brought damp sticks, and they would not catch ; the shavings were burned out, and there were only a few scraps of paper to use instead.

‘It was too late to get to Longside, Leah,’ I said, by way of explanation, ‘so I am come back. Can’t I help you ? There’s a *Weekly Messenger* in the drawer, which I suppose may be used.’

‘You’ll please let that stay,’ was the reply. ‘There’s an advertisement in it which William wants to have kept. It’s all that girl’s fault—green sticks like these ! They won’t light for a twelvemonth.’ Leah caught up the matchbox, rubbed her last match, and found that it wouldn’t go off, and then tossed the box upon the table, and sat down in William’s leathern arm-chair with her arms folded. I went out to the kitchen, and brought back some more shavings, and another box of matches. ‘Certainly,’ I said, as I gathered up the green sticks, ‘it is very tiresome. There are plenty of dry faggots in the wood-house, I know.’

‘This sort of thing won’t go on,’ said Leah, not at all hastily, but in a tone which to me was much worse.

I made no reply.

‘I shall go over to Compton to-morrow,’ she continued, ‘and tell Mrs Richardson so. I can’t have liars in my house. They will look a long time before they see any more of my money for Compton school, if that is the way they bring their girls up.’

I was afraid I should only irritate her more by answering, but I could not hear a false accusation without trying to put it right, so I explained what had really been the case about the milk. All I gained in reply was, ‘Very likely ; it might be true, or it mightn’t ; but Esther was a girl who wasn’t to be trusted. She could not even lay a fire. She never remembered a thing that was told her ; and if she didn’t break the dish herself, she was the cause of its being broken, and that was just as bad. So impertinent she was too,—and such a quantity of milk spilt,—Mrs Weir must go without it, there wouldn’t be a drop for her,—old customers must be attended to first.’ These and many more remarks, equally annoying, I had to bear in the best way

I could, and that I thought was silently ; but silence only made matters worse. When Leah found herself uncontradicted, she turned her wrath upon me. It was all my doing, I was at the bottom of every mischief ; it was I who had insisted upon taking Esther ; I, who had taught her badly—indeed, had entirely neglected her. If I could have believed her, my love of going about visiting was the cause of the mishap in the dairy, and the green sticks, and the extinguished fire.

I was not unaccustomed to such accusations. I went on trying to make the fire burn, and by the help of the bellows succeeded at last, so that the room was quite cheerful with a blaze ; and then I set out the tea-tray, and brought in the bread and butter, and put out some cake for William, Leah all the time not taking the least notice, but sitting moodily apart. At length, when she found she could not get a word from me, she went up-stairs.

I give no credit to myself for forbearance. It was simply a matter of necessity. If I had said one word, I must have said a hundred. I was, in fact, so angry that I could not trust myself to speak. Perhaps, with such a violent temper as mine was naturally, and a principle of religion which had not, as it were, come to its full growth, this was as much as I could expect. But it would have been better if I had learned to turn my wrathful feelings into prayers. I might not then have heard all the bitter things Leah said, and I am sure I should not have treasured them in my heart as I did. I went up-stairs to find Jessie, and gave vent before her more than I ought to have done, and that did me no good, especially as Jessie was inclined to take Leah's part, partly, I think, because she felt vexed with me for not having flattered her more.

After a while, I sent Jessie down to explain for herself why she was there, and to make tea if she was wanted, and presently I heard her talking away quite cheerfully to William. I could not make up my mind to go down myself, but there I sat close to the window, looking out upon the heavy clouds which came floating across the sky, tinged with a faint glow from the sunset. I was better in some degree, for I had tried to pray for a few moments when Jessie left me, and my temper was quieter ; but I could not forget what had passed, and my thoughts were gloomy as the deepening twilight. Mrs Price, Leah, Jessie, Esther, all seemed going the wrong way ; some from one cause, some from another. And there was no way of doing good. I

thought I was to be useful to Esther, but she was to be taken away from me. I wished to save Jessie, but she depended upon Leah more than upon me. I had cherished a hope when I came to Sandcombe, of persuading William, if not Leah, to look upon things in a different way, but I did not see that I had the slightest influence. William was not at all more constant at church because I went twice. He took the Sunday afternoons for settling the accounts just the same, and never read anything but the *Mark Lane Express* or the *Hove Advertiser*; and the way things went on about the farm and the servants was not altered in the least. My life seemed quite thrown away. And as to my own temper and principles, I had only to look at myself at that moment and see all the angry, proud, revengeful feelings which were struggling for the mastery, to be quite sure that there was very little improvement in them. If I had only remained with Mrs Weir, I said to myself—and I went off in thought into a consideration of what might have been the consequence, both to her and myself, when Jessie ran up-stairs to bring me down to tea, saying that William was tired of waiting.

Leah was not in the room. Tea was poured out, and she did not come; and when William went up to her, he brought back word that she had a headache, and was lying on her bed. William was in very good spirits, rather merry than otherwise. He was pleased to have Jessie there, and joked her about Dene, and especially, to my great annoyance, about Lieutenant Macdonald. I rather imprudently carried on the subject, by repeating what I had heard of him, and especially of his habit of drinking; and William, really, I believe, for the mere amusement of contradicting, took his part, and made light of it, saying that it was what all young men would do if it came in their way, only some had the cleverness to conceal it. I was sure, and I told him so, that he was wrong. I don't believe that either Roger or John Hervey ever did such a thing, and William himself was always sober from a boy. It vexed me that he should say such things before Jessie. It is so bad for any one to have a low opinion of others; and, moreover, it has always been a puzzle to me, how persons can talk lightly of such a habit as Mr Macdonald's. Putting aside the evil in this world, the Bible always classes it with the worst sins. To hear a drunken scene turned into ridicule, is to me like hearing people laugh about the devil. It makes me shudder. But then, the world would say I am over particular.

When Jessie went up-stairs to take Leah a cup of tea, I made a remark of this kind to William, and brought him to agree with me. I did not like to tell him how matters really stood between Jessie and the lieutenant, but I said enough to put him on his guard, and make him feel that to encourage Jessie in thinking about such a man was very unwise, to say the least. There was something in William which I could always reach when I had him to myself. It was not goodness or principle, I am afraid, but it was a kind of straightforward sense and perception of truth. Selfishness blinded him whenever he did see things crookedly. The provoking thing was, that one never could depend upon him. He might agree with everything that was said one minute, and the next he would go and act directly against it.

Jessie, when she came down, said that Leah's head was very bad, and she thought she had caught cold standing about in the dairy; I offered to go up to her, but Jessie thought I had better not. She did not exactly say that Leah was too much put out with me to see me, but I was certain it was so. It did not strike me, however, that there could be much the matter, for Jessie told me that Leah had talked about a dinner party which she thought of giving the week after Christmas, and a card party had been mentioned too. Generally speaking, but little visiting went on round Sandcombe, the farms were so scattered; William and Leah, however, always gave rather a grand party at Christmas time, and Leah went out a good deal then, sometimes as often as twice in the week.

Jessie cared little for dinner or cards, what she wanted was a dance; but she could not bring Leah round upon that point, she said, and I own I was not very sorry for it.

We sat rather long gossiping over the fire after tea. When William went out to look round the farm, Jessie very good-naturedly offered to see to one or two things which I was in the habit of attending to, and left me at my work. But presently she came back with a note in her hand. It had been brought, she said, from Stonecliff, and the man was waiting to know if there was any answer.

'Let him go and warm himself by the kitchen-fire, Jessie,' I said, 'it will take some time to read this; and perhaps you will just look out a pen and some paper for me, in case I should have to write.' I drew the candle near and began to read. No spectacles were required; Miss Milicent's letters might have been distinguished from each other, half across the room—

'I went away from you to-day in a hurry, Ursie Grant, but why did not you come after me? I expected you. There is a great deal to say to you; more than I can put on paper to-night. Lieutenant Macdonald was half-tipsy, I don't think he knew what he was saying. Come over to-morrow morning if you can, and if you can't, come to-morrow afternoon. Matilda Temple complains of the Sandcombe butter; I don't eat butter myself. My mother has had a bad nervous attack; Matilda Temple has been with her all the afternoon. As I said, she won't let her go to my father. I should like to know how much we are to believe of the news. I should not like to live in France, but it might be better than Stonecliff. Matilda Temple means to go and hear the school-children examined at Hatton to-morrow. It is not her parish, but it will take her out of your way, if you come over. If you hear of any one who wants sea-anemones, you may send me word; I shall give mine away if we go to France.

'I am, Ursie Grant,

'Your sincere friend,

'MILICENT WEIR.'

Not much of an answer could be given to this note, it was too perplexing; but I wrote because I would not trust to a message, lest there might be some fret with Mrs Temple. If she knew I was likely to be at Stonecliff, she might possibly put herself in my way. I merely said, however, that if I possibly could, I would walk over in the course of the afternoon, but Miss Milicent must not be vexed with me if I did not come, for I could not answer for myself; and the man was sent back.

'Ursie,' said William to me that night, when I went to bed, 'Leah has a terrible cold; what do you think I had better give her?'

I recommended something warm, but I did not offer again to go and see her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I WOKE the next morning with the feeling that all the business of the house depended upon me. I was dressed long before daylight, and down-stairs helping Jessie to get breakfast,

because Esther came late. I went to the dairy, and fed the poultry, and gave the orders for the day, and I made the tea, and cut the bread for breakfast, and talked to William and Jessie, and arranged for Jessie to stay the day, because of Leah's being ill; in fact, I did everything for every one, except myself. I was in a proud mood, and I would not get the better of it. 'If Leah does not send for me,' I said to myself, 'she may just do without me.'

Jessie declared she was very feverish. I asked if a doctor should see her, and William laughed at the notion. In the afternoon, before I went over to Stonecliff, I told Jessie to go up-stairs and let Leah know I was going. I thought perhaps that she would wish to see me then, for there had been some more trouble about the butter, and I knew she had a message to send. But Jessie only brought back word that I was to tell Mrs Weir there would be no butter all the winter. It vexed me more than I would quite own to myself to go off and leave her, though it would be only for a few hours, without having had a word of peace with her, and the next day Christmas-day too, and I preparing for the Communion. I actually turned back, after I had reached the farm-yard gate, resolved to see her, but Jessie told me she was asleep then, so it was of no use, and I continued my walk.

Stonecliff was a much better house than the cottage on the Heath. It had, besides, a good-sized garden, and a coach-house and stables. A tolerably large income would have been required to live there comfortably, for it was a kind of place which would naturally occasion expenses.

The garden gave most trouble, for the place lay quite open to the south-west, and the salt spray dried up the vegetation; but there was a glorious view to make up for it, all over the bay to the great white cliffs, and the far distant coast, which could be seen like a gray cloud on the edge of the sea; and the sound of the dashing waves, and the feeling of the fresh, free breeze, came to one with such a gift of life, and hope, and strength—in spite of its wildness, I could have been very fond of Stonecliff if it had been my home.

I found Miss Milicent in a little study, opening out of the drawing-room. She was drying sea-weeds; but said as I entered, without looking up from her occupation, 'There's a chair for you, Ursie; I am glad you are come.'

'I hope Mrs Weir is better to-day, Miss Milicent,' I said.

'She may be better, but she is not quieter.'

'Was the news yesterday so very bad?' I ventured to ask.

She pushed aside the table at which she had been busy, and, turning round to face me, replied, 'Your name is not Weir, Ursie Grant, and you can't understand.'

'Perhaps not, entirely,' I said, 'but no one can blame you, nor Mrs Weir, Miss Millicent, whatever may be wrong.'

'Listen to me, Ursie,' she continued, and she leaned her clenched hand on the table, and bent forward with eagerness. 'I had to talk to that man yesterday, and he was not sober, and he called himself our friend, the friend of the family, and he wanted to shake hands—who was to bear that?'

'He was not the more your friend for calling himself so,' I replied.

'But he is,' she added, bitterly, and she walked away suddenly to the other end of the room. 'You are an honest girl,' she added, returning, and placing both her hands on my shoulders. 'You won't think lower of us because our name is Weir; I was proud enough of the name once,' she added, in a lower tone.

'Indeed, Miss Millicent,' I said, 'you know well enough that it is an honour to me to do anything I can for you. You have only to tell me what. I am very sorry you were so annoyed yesterday with seeing that disagreeable man, but perhaps you won't have to do it again.'

'I shall though, Ursie. I must go there again. There is a great deal to arrange with him. He knows all my father's concerns.'

The veins in her forehead swelled as she spoke the words. I gazed at her in surprise. Such proud feelings I had never remarked in her before, and yet I could scarcely call them proud. In her place I should have felt as she did, and not blamed myself. Mr Weir had once been a gentleman, honoured and respected. She could never forget that.

'Mr Richardson, or Mr Temple, would see him for you,' I began; but she interrupted me.

'No, Ursie, no spies, no strangers, none but his daughter shall hear of him. And I couldn't talk to any one but you,' she added, as large tears coursed themselves down her cheek.

Poor thing! Words can't express how sorry I felt for her, but I could not understand why she should choose me to talk to. It came out, however, very soon.

‘You know all, Ursie,’ she said, ‘the difficulties and tempers; my mother’s ways, and Matilda Temple’s; you understand it. I can’t go and tell Mr Richardson everything; and I trust you, Ursie; I trust you with all my heart.’

I gave her my hand, and she grasped it heartily.

‘The trouble is about helping him,’ she continued. ‘This man says he wants money, and that he is going to join in a business—wine-selling, I think; but I don’t put faith in what is told me; only he declares, my father is so poor now, if he could have help he would go on steadily. What does Lieutenant Macdonald mean by steadiness?’

‘You must not trust Lieutenant Macdonald,’ I said. ‘If Mr Weir is found, some one else must go and see him, and judge what is really the state of the case.’

‘And who?’ she exclaimed. ‘My mother?’

‘Oh no! Miss Milicent, never. How could you think of such a thing?’

‘Then I? By myself? Leaving my mother with Matilda Temple? I have thought about it.’

For the moment it seemed the only plan. Yet for her to go abroad alone, it was next to impossible; and I said, ‘You would not trust Mr Temple, I suppose, Miss Milicent?’

‘Trust a baby in long clothes! Ursie, where are your senses?’

‘John Hervey!’ I exclaimed, as with a sudden inspiration.

She sat down, and leaned her head upon her hand. I heard her murmur to herself, ‘He knows him; he can’t think worse of him.’

‘John Hervey knew Mr Weir years ago, Miss Milicent,’ I said. ‘He would respect and help him for the sake of those old times.’

Her countenance worked with a conflict of feeling; but presently she said, quite calmly, ‘If he could go he must be paid.’

‘His expenses must be paid,’ I said. ‘He would give his time, I am sure, if possible.’

‘Matilda Temple holds the purse-strings,’ observed Miss Milicent.

I was silent—that subject was beyond me.

Miss Milicent sat lost in thought; her cogitations seemed to come to no satisfactory termination, for, after a silence of at least five minutes, she said to me abruptly, ‘You will go upstairs and see my mother, Ursie. She knows you are here.’

Not a word about plans, remember. Under any circumstances she can't go.'

I left her. My suggestion would, I knew, work better in solitude than if I was with her; and with a slow step, very different from that with which in former days I had been accustomed to seek Mrs Weir's presence, I went up-stairs and knocked at the door of her sitting-room.

'Come in,' said the gentle voice, which always sounded more sweet to me than any other. 'O Ursula! it is you! How are you? Will you sit down?'

Mrs Weir pointed to a chair, and then turned away her face, and I saw her take up her handkerchief to wipe away the tears which filled her swollen eyes.

I longed to go near to her, and show that I was sorry for her, but I could not make the first advance. I could only say, 'Miss Milicent tells me, ma'am, that you have had a bad night.'

'Rather disturbed, Ursula. I never sleep well now. I thought I should have done well to take a sleeping-draught before I went to bed, but my niece did not like it.'

'You used to take it occasionally, ma'am, if I remember,' I said.

'Yes, occasionally; it is a very bad habit. My niece says I ought to cure myself of it; and she never takes such things herself, though she is very nervous, and lies awake half the night.'

A pause followed. Not knowing what to say next, I remarked, without thinking what I was saying, that I was afraid Miss Milicent had a cold, dark walk, the last evening. She was out so late.

'Milicent is always out late,' replied Mrs Weir. 'She is away all the day. I don't see her, I only see my niece, and no one ever comes to call, except Mr Richardson, and he has not been to see me so often as formerly.'

'Perhaps your friends don't know you would like to see them, ma'am,' I replied.

'Perhaps so, Ursula; but people change. I did not think they would. I thought if they loved me once they would love me always. But we are not to put our trust in human friends; my niece tells me that.'

'But indeed, dear ma'am,' I exclaimed, rather hastily, 'I don't know where we are told to distrust them.'

'I do not remember any verse, Ursula,' replied Mrs Weir,

quietly; 'but God teaches us by experience; only it takes a long time to learn the truth.'

'I hope it will take a very long time before you learn to distrust me, dear ma'am,' I said; 'if I might be so bold as to consider myself your friend.'

'Did I say distrust, Ursula? I did not mean it; but young people go away and forget, and we ought not to expect that it should be otherwise.'

I could not help understanding this, and yet I did not know how to take it up.

Mrs Weir continued, still in the same mournful tone which was her nearest approach to anger, 'My niece has sent some messages to Mrs Grant, Ursula, about the butter, but I dare say you were too busy to attend to the orders.'

What orders? I could not remember any, and I said so.

'It does not signify, it will do no good to vex ourselves about such trifles,' added Mrs Weir. 'I told my niece that I did not care about it. I was only sorry, Ursula, because I thought you would have managed it for me, but I am sure you could not help it; I was only hurt for the moment;' and she held out her hand to me kindly.

Just for an instant I thought I would try and explain, but any one who had looked at Mrs Weir would have seen that explanation upon any subject then must be useless. Even this little fault-finding had put her into a state of nervousness which was quite painful. I could only take her hand, as she offered it me, and say heartily, 'Dear ma'am, you will never understand how things are till I can come back and stay in the house a little, and look after you.'

Her sad face lighted up with such a bright smile for a second, but it clouded again, and she said, gravely, 'O Ursula! if you ever came to live with me I should want you to speak quite plainly, and tell me everything, and you would not like that. You know you did not like to tell about the little broken chess-man.'

I felt stung to the quick; that she should remember that trifle, and take it up so wrongly too! It must have been dinned into her ears every day, or she would surely have forgotten it long ago.

Mrs Weir saw that I was vexed, and with her usual impulse of kind-heartedness, tried to do away with the effect of her words, by reminding me how well I used to nurse her, and what a

comfort I had once been to her. But she could not deceive me. I felt chilled, and I confess I was unjust to her. I forgot her weak health, and the ease with which a person in her state may be worked upon, and attributed the misunderstanding to fickleness. 'I am afraid, ma'am,' I answered proudly, 'that you can have but little pleasure in the company of a person whom you suspect of not speaking the truth, so I had better go.' I stood up, intending to wish her good morning, but she looked at me with an earnest, even an imploring gaze, as she said, whilst every limb seemed to tremble with agitation, 'Then, Ursula, you do not care for me any more than my other friends do.'

I caught hold of her hand and kissed it. 'Dear ma'am,' I exclaimed, 'indeed I don't understand you. Nobody cares for you more than I do, if you would only believe it, and not listen to the unkind things which are said against me. Who could help loving you?' I added.

'Ah, Ursula,' she replied, and her lips quivered, 'people have left off loving me since I came to Compton. My niece knows the world, and she showed me that my friends cared for me when I lived at Dene; but they have left me now. I ought not to mind it. I have my niece, and she is very good to me. She says I shall never go away from her; but, Ursula, do you know,' her voice sank as she looked timidly round the room, 'we have had news—news of my husband—Mr Weir. Do you not think I ought to go to him? Do not answer loudly; they hear sometimes.'

'There is no one to hear now, ma'am,' I said quickly; 'but I think, if you will let me say it, that you had better not trouble yourself about Mr Weir just now. You can wait till you learn more about him, and then by and by you can go if it should seem right.'

'By and by,' she repeated; 'yes, soon that would be, if my niece would allow it. But I ought to go, Ursula, I am his wife, only Mrs Temple thinks it wrong. I shall tell her what you say.'

Poor lady! all her old loving confidence in me was returning, and as I perceived it, every remaining feeling of annoyance on my side vanished. I sat down again, I felt I might comfort and soothe her, and I was happy. But the door opened, and Miss Milicent entered.

'Mother, have you finished talking to Ursie Grant?' she began.

‘Do you want her, Milicent? I shall be sorry to say good-bye. She is so kind in coming to see me.’

‘There is no time to spare, mother. Matilda Temple will be back directly. I must have you, Ursie.’

‘Matilda is coming now, I think,’ said Mrs Weir.

No one else had heard the footstep, but Mrs Weir was right.

Miss Milicent beckoned to me. ‘Come, Ursie, come, we are better out of the way.’

‘If you please I will wait and see Mrs Temple,’ I replied, for I was resolved not to be abashed by her.

There was a pause on the staircase; Mrs Weir’s old feeling of restraint seemed to have returned. She said nervously, ‘Good-bye, Ursula; you will come again some day, when you have time.’

Even she then wished me to go, and I went. I passed Mrs Temple in the lobby, and received from her a bend of the head, so slight as scarcely to be noticed. A feeling came over me as though I had left Mrs Weir in the hands of a gaoler.

‘I have settled, Ursie,’ exclaimed Miss Milicent, as she led the way to the study, and closed the door behind her. ‘I won’t be indebted to any one, I will go myself.’

I could not tell what to reply, and Miss Milicent added, hurriedly, ‘Don’t object; I can’t bear objections.’

Few people can, I thought to myself; but the scheme was mad.

‘I shall go,’ she continued. ‘I know a person who will go with me, an old servant. She has been in France; she travelled with us eight years ago. I shall talk to Lieutenant Macdonald again; perhaps he may be more sober. I must go, Ursie. I must have my own way.’

Who would doubt that? Miss Milicent ought to know more of the difficulties than I did, but they crowded upon me. It seemed an expensive plan, taking two people instead of one. I doubted if Miss Milicent would know how to help her father when she was with him. I believed that such matters of business required a man’s head to arrange them. I thought that to leave Mrs Weir was giving up a first duty. I was sure that trouble would follow if Mrs Temple was allowed to go her own way so entirely without check. But Miss Milicent was totally undisciplined; whatever she took into her head must always be carried through; and at the bottom of the decision there lay—I don’t believe she saw it, but I am not the less sure that it was

there—the desire to escape from a wearisome life, the struggle of conscience, and contact with Mrs Temple. Any duty rather than that which was at hand.

I believe it is so with us all at times.

I continued to put in my word of advice, and that rather boldly. ‘Miss Milicent,’ I said, ‘you do not know under what circumstances, or in what company, you may find Mr Weir ; it may be very unfitting for a lady to go where he is.’

She would not hear me. It was all nonsense, she said. Where there was a will there was a way. She didn’t know what fear was, and as for the opinion of the world, she cared not a whit for it. That very afternoon she should write to the servant, and inquire whether she could go.

I had nothing to offer in reply. I could but say that I hoped she would consider the matter well before she decided upon it. She disliked the appearance of opposition, and when I proposed to leave her, she was glad that I should go.

Something seemed to strike her just at last about her mother, for as I was going away she said, holding my hand, and speaking very earnestly, ‘You will be near, Ursie, if my mother wants anything ; and you won’t mind Matilda Temple’s humours?’

It was a satisfactory thought to Miss Milicent, but it was anything but satisfactory to me.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

INSTEAD of going home over the down, I went round by Hatton, and up the stony lane. It was a long walk, but I had a little shopping to do in Hatton. In the grocer’s shop, I met Mr Hervey, I told him where I came from, and that I was on my way back to Sandcombe : and he offered to walk with me. He had been over to Hatton on business of his own, but he was going back to Longside, to be present at the giving away of a loaf of bread to all the families who lived in Farmer Kemp’s cottages, and to all his labourers and boys. It was an old Christmas eve custom ; and there was to be a dinner for the labourers the next day, so there was enough to do at Longside ; and Mary, I heard, was very busy, and very provoked with me for not having gone to her the evening before.

All this was told me as we walked slowly up Hatton lane ; but John Hervey had something else in his mind, and I had something else in mine ; and yet we neither of us liked to speak of it. He could not tell me of his private news about Mr Weir, and I could not tell him of Miss Millicent's plans, though I knew he would be likely soon to hear of them. We were much more silent than usual, and once or twice I cut him rather short in something he was saying—not meaning it, but merely because I was thinking of other matters. It never struck me that he might notice my manner, till we parted ; then he said, in a marked tone, 'We used to be great friends, Ursie, and have a good deal to say to each other—but somehow times seemed changed.'

My colour came, not because I was angry, but ashamed. I really had never regularly made up with him since the evening we had that little fuss about Mrs Weir and my interference.

'I didn't think you had a memory for old grievances, Mr Hervey,' I said, laughing a little awkwardly ; 'I am sure if there is a change, it is not in me.'

'There are no grievances, Ursie,' he replied, more gravely than I expected ; 'only if I am a friend once, I am a friend always.'

'And so am I, I hope,' was my reply ; 'we are making a great deal out of nothing, Mr Hervey.'

'Yes, it is nothing,' he said ; 'nothing to you, Ursie. There is no reason why it should be anything else. Good-bye, I didn't mean to say anything disagreeable.'

He held out his hand, and I shook it very warmly, for I liked him heartily. But he was cold-mannered still. I told him to give my love to Mary, and to bring her over to see me as soon as he could. But he made no promises, and it rather provoked me to see him so odd and moody.

He could scarcely have left me more than two or three minutes, when I heard a voice calling behind me, 'Ursie, stop ! Ursie, why don't you stop ?' William was coming after me.

'What is the matter ?' I said, turning round slowly.

Instead of answering me, he asked quickly, 'Who was that with you ?'

'John Hervey,' I replied ; 'look, he is going along the down now ;' and without another word, William was off like a shot. I thought it strange, and waited to watch what would pass between them. William overtook Mr Hervey in a few seconds ; then I saw them talking together in a great hurry, and to my

surprise, John Hervey changed his path, and was away towards Compton, in less time than I could have thought possible.

William rejoined me. 'He's gone for the doctor,' he said; 'it was better than my going. Ursie, she is desperately ill!'

'She!—who?' I exclaimed; whilst all the blood in my veins seemed chilled, and my heart for a second stopped beating.

'Leah!—Haven't you heard? It is worse every hour.'

'It!—the fever! I didn't know she had any!'

'You have not been near her;' said William, bitterly. 'It was coming on when you went off this afternoon.'

I said not a word for myself. If he had told me I had killed her, I should have acquiesced.

'Jessie has been with her,' continued William; 'we should have sent for you, but we expected you in every instant.'

'I wish with all my heart you had sent!' I exclaimed. 'I could have been back nearly an hour ago. But—I don't understand—it was a cold, nothing else.'

'Nothing else that you knew,' said William; 'but I thought it wasn't all right this afternoon myself; and if you had been there, I should have made you go to her. Jessie is such a child, she is not fit for anything. The fever has the upper hand now, she is quite wandering.'

'Leah is always feverish when she has a cold,' I said. 'She may only be a little more so than usual.'

'You can judge for yourself,' was William's answer, and he did not say another word as we hurried across the farm-yard and into the house.

I rushed up to Leah's room, drew aside the curtain, and looked at her. William was right; she was desperately ill.

I need not say what that evening was like. How in a few hours the whole aspect of a house may be changed by the presence of serious illness almost all know by sad experience. It was as though every person's business had been suddenly put an end to, as if indeed it was unfeeling for any one to attend to anything. William sat brooding over the fire, Jessie ran up and down stairs on useless errands, Martha gossiped with the men about 'mistress's illness,' and Esther Smithson, whom I had kept to sleep at Sandcombe thinking she might be wanted, was ordered to do all which no one else had time for.

And I,—I don't know what I felt,—I believe I was thankful to be busy. There was a heavy load at my heart which would otherwise have been unendurable.

No neglect had I been guilty of intentionally. No suspicion of real illness, much less of danger, had for an instant crossed my mind when I left Leah that morning ; but I had given way to a proud temper ; she had done me wrong, and I had waited for her to apologise, instead of taking the first step towards reconciliation myself. I had allowed the 'sun to go down upon my wrath,' and to rise upon it again, and the ill feeling had kept me from her. I might not indeed have been of use to her. Her husband was the person responsible, if any one was to blame, for not having sooner perceived the serious nature of the illness ; but I could not be innocent in my own eyes, nor, as I could perceive, in those of William and Jessie.

John Hervey came back with the doctor from Compton, and when he heard that it was a serious matter, he proposed to ride over himself to Hove for further advice. William hesitated, but I urged it ; I was resolved there should be nothing more to reproach myself with. John went, and was back again with a second doctor before eleven o'clock. Then he offered to stay all night,—and I should have been thankful to keep him, he had such a quick thought and ready hand in times of difficulty,—but William objected, for he liked nothing that put him out of his ordinary way ; and hiding his face from danger, tried to forget that it existed.

I sat up with Leah alone. She did not know me ; in her delirium she complained of me, and thought I was treating her unkindly. Once she called out for me, and said I would not come near her. The fever increased ; I expected nothing better ; the Hove doctor had talked of nine days before the crisis : he was not sure, but he thought it likely, and I summoned up my courage to bear the suspense. Such anxieties are scarcely dependent upon affection. I did not love Leah, but I could have willingly taken her place, and been in her danger to save her.

Morning dawned, that freezing, dreary dawn which belongs to the depth of winter, and Jessie stole into the room to beg that I would go to rest. But I turned from the thought of rest ; and when she took my place at the bedside, I went down-stairs to give the men their Christmas breakfast of ale and toast, the only relic of the old customs in my mother's time.

They were respectful and sympathising in their manner, and I felt myself among friends and was cheered ; but when I left them, I heard their jokes go on as though nothing was amiss. It was Christmas-day to them. It was no day to me until, as I

stood for a minute at the open window of my own room, I heard the peal of the merry bells of Hatton church. Then a better feeling came over me, and I knelt down and prayed God to forgive me in whatsoever I had done amiss in my intercourse with Leah, and to spare her, and raise her up again to live from thenceforth to His glory.

CHAPTER XL.

IT was not the will of God that my prayer should be granted. Nine days afterwards, and Leah was dead. In that short period I had lived as it seemed through years; for I had gazed upon death, and faced the terrors of eternity.

I cannot write about it minutely. At the time I was in a troubled dream. Looking back I can feel nothing but wonder and thankfulness at the mercy which sustained me through the trial. For all was left to me from the beginning. William was at first stunned. His wife had been in many ways unsuited to him, she had given him many hours of vexation, but he was used to her, and understood her; he had taught himself to depend upon her; and the thought of being left alone filled him with unspeakable dreariness. When she was gone, he went about his daily business, but I saw him often turn from the empty parlour, and sit down within the wide hearth in the kitchen, and cry like a child.

People told us we had one great comfort, that after the first everything had been done which could be; and it was true. No money had been spared to give her doctors' advice, a nurse had been hired that she might never want attention, Mr Richardson had called every day, and prayed for her when he could not pray with her, and at the end, when consciousness came back to her, there was the comfort of knowing that he had done all he could to make her prepare for her great change. But I could never forget the beginning of her illness, and if she had not before the last, said, 'Good-bye, Ursie,' and looked at me kindly, I think I should have been broken-hearted.

Yet I did not dwell so much upon her; I felt I must trust her with all her faults, all her shortcomings, to Him who alone knew

her heart, its trials and struggles, but rather I turned with a bitter self-distrust to my own position.

Who was I that I should venture to rule others, when conscience told me I had so little rule over myself? When for the first time I sat at the head of William's table, as the acknowledged mistress of his household, it was with a feeling very different from that which had led me to criticise Leah's arrangements in other days. I had continually failed in humility, in gentleness, and charity. I had obeyed,—but from necessity, not from a willing heart, and the first qualification necessary for those who would govern well is the power of obeying well. It seemed as though it were meant to punish and humble me, that all my duties presented themselves in confusion,—one interfering with another, my own will and William's perpetually coming in contact, and claims from without, and anxieties from within, pressing upon me, so that there were moments when I felt inclined to sit down with my hands folded, and let others take their way, merely because I had not the spirit to try and make them go mine.

It was about a fortnight after Leah's funeral—that painful time succeeding a great shock, when we try to look upon the present and the past as one, and find that God has placed a great gulf between them, which in this world can never be bridged over—I thought I would steal a few moments of quietness to think of all I wished to do, and to alter the arrangements which in Leah's time I had found fault with, and said that if I were at the head of affairs they should be different. These were many; some, of course, more important than others, but all requiring consideration and contrivance.

The men and boys who slept in the house were left entirely to themselves. They were placed together in an old part of the house, reached by a staircase, which led to the women-servants' rooms as well. So there was no one to look after them.

I had heard through Martha that they were often very profane in their language, and that if a boy, fresh from school, with good habits, knelt down to say his prayers, they would mock him till he gave up the practice. I had spoken about this to Leah; I had told her that at least she ought to take Martha away from the risk of such company. But I was always put off with a laugh at my particularity, as it was called. What had done very well for the Sandcombe servants for thirty years, I was told, would surely continue to do for them for thirty years to come.

This was a thing to be remedied at once, and yet I was met instantly by a difficulty as to fitting up what was now a lumber-room for Martha, and so bringing upon William expenses which he would consider unnecessary. Sunday was another burden upon my mind. Martha never went to church in the morning, so that she had no opportunity of receiving the Communion, even if she had wished it. I had several times offered to remain at home myself, but she would not hear of it. I could do as I liked now, but if I was not at church, I was sure William would never trouble himself to think about the men and see if they were there. In fact, he was very irregular in his own attendance, remaining at home on the least excuse, and I had strong suspicions that the men often took advantage of this, and went to public-houses, and got into bad company, on a Sunday. It was impossible for me to be at home and at church too, and wherever I was, I seemed compelled to leave something neglected. As for Sunday reading, the men, if they read at all, followed William's example, and spent their time in spelling over a newspaper. I thought I might do something to help in that way by bringing them together, and asking Mr Richardson to lend me some interesting book to read to them, but I was very ignorant, and shy too, and fancied I should never have courage to begin, even if William were to allow it, which was doubtful.

But the thing I had most set my heart upon was having family prayers. They were managed at Longside, and I earnestly desired to have it so with us. In the morning, indeed, when the men were all out in the fields, only Farmer Kemp's own family and the in-door servants could attend; but, in the evening, all who slept in the house met in the room where the maids sat, and where most of the needlework was done; and then Father Kemp regularly read a chapter in the Bible, and had prayers. I remember hearing him describe the difficulty he had in beginning the practice, and how the men only made a mock of it; but he persevered, and now there could not be a more well-behaved congregation in a church, than that which met at Longside every evening.

But Farmer Kemp was master there, and had all his family on his side. William was master at Sandcombe, and would be entirely set against the notion. The fulfilment of my wish seemed a great way off, and I had but few things externally to help me in the meantime. Sandcombe was so far from Mr

Richardson, and from Compton church, that I could gain but little comfort from them. I saw Mr Richardson every now and then, but I could not go to him to talk over my everyday difficulties; and as for church, I could very seldom go, except on Sundays. The services were too early and too late, and the utmost I could hope was to manage the walk occasionally, on the saints' days, when there were prayers and a short sermon at eleven, and when I might have business to take me to Compton.

Perhaps the improvement which I had the greatest chance of carrying out, was as to the outward behaviour of the men who worked on the farm. Both William and Leah had a great notion of being respectable, and anything which created a scandal, or made people talk about them, was dreaded. And yet they would often keep men about them whose characters were known to be bad, and who did untold mischief to others. This arose, in a great measure, from Leah's indolence, and William's dislike to face anything disagreeable. There were one or two men about whom I had heard things which made me urge William to rid himself of them; but he never would inquire into the stories, and Leah always said that the men were not her concern, and so they worked on, and every day I was sure that they were doing harm, especially to the women and girls, who were often employed in the fields, and heard their bad language, and saw their evil ways. Once, when there was a press of work, and a lack of hands, it was proposed to send Esther into the fields, but I managed to prevent that myself. I felt that I was in a certain way answerable for her to Mrs Richardson, and I could not bear to think of her being corrupted by such company.

It struck me that if I could only inquire, and find two steady labourers to take the place of those whom I wished to turn off, I might, without much difficulty, bring William to agree to it, and this would be the beginning of what I hoped might at length prove a great amendment.

I sat alone, as I before said, planning all these changes, when I was interrupted by William. He was accustomed now to wander into the house many times in the course of the day. No particular business brought him, but he was restless,—always thinking to ease the burden at his heart by change. Just at first, I thought that he had come at the right moment, and I was upon the point of opening out my wishes to him, but I remembered how he disliked changes, and I knew, too, that old govern-

ments are very jealous of new ones, and so I thought I would delay, or, at least, sound my way before I made any propositions. And it was fortunate that I did, for I should surely have met with opposition. He was bent upon an arrangement of his own. Poor fellow! he wanted the appearance of a settled state of things, even if he could not have the reality, and he was come to make a proposal to me, he said.

I did not like the sound of the word, but I answered: 'Anything, William, by which I can be a comfort to you, you know I shall be very glad to do.'

'It would be comfort for yourself too, Ursie,' he said, 'you know you have your own living to get in the world, at least there is little enough for you without, and you may just as well make your money with me as with any one else. I would give you a fixed sum by the year, and you might be able to put something away out of it.'

So strangely blind we are! It will scarcely be believed that up to this moment, I had never put before myself the fact, that Leah's death might be the means of separating me from Roger for ever.

My heart seemed to rise up in my throat and choke my voice.

William thought I was touched by the feeling of the great change which had come over us. He said to me kindly, 'It would be the best thing for us both, Ursie. We understand each other, and shall get on very well together. Things can't be as they were, but we must make the best of them.'

'And Roger?' I exclaimed.

'Oh! Roger will marry,' was his careless answer; 'he is sure to marry in that out-of-the-way country.'

I rose up, and turned away my face from him, whilst I held up my work to the window under the pretence that I could not see to thread my needle, though in fact I only wanted time to recover myself, I spoke to him after a few seconds, I think quite calmly. 'It is very kind of you, William,' I said, 'to wish to make a fixed agreement that shall continue, but it might not be quite wise. Only as long as I stay with you, I should be very much obliged for an allowance, because now that I have to look after everything, I can't give any time to needlework.'

As the words came from my lips, I felt how cold they were, seemingly ungracious and unthankful, and William longing, as I could see, for something to turn to and be fond of. I tried to make them better. I said he was always kind to me, that I was

sure we should manage very well if we had to be together. I turned my sentence in the way I thought most likely to please him, but I could not say what I knew he wished to hear : 'William, it will make me happy to live with you.'

He was a proud man, and shy, as proud men often are. He was thrown back by me, and he could not make a second advance. 'You shall do as you like, Ursie,' he said, 'I don't wish to put constraint upon any one. I thought it would be wise to place things on a regular footing, but if you like better to continue as you are, living, as it were, from hand to mouth, why, you must please yourself.'

No, this was not at all what I liked. I must have things put on a regular footing, as he called it, if I was to remain with him ; but the sacrifice which this might involve, I was not prepared for.

'William,' I said, 'you must let me think this over by myself. We are all in a bewilderment now. I don't think we either of us know what we wish or want. A month hence we may tell better.'

He looked at me for a second, tried to whistle as he used to do when half angry and half astonished, broke off abruptly in the middle, and went away.

As I ran up-stairs to my own room, I heard him giving some orders in a loud, strained voice, and then I saw him walk off with long strides across the fields.

CHAPTER XLI.

I HAD greatly pained William, and at the very time when I was most anxious to give him consolation. But how could it be otherwise? Was it possible, was it in any way to be expected, that I should entirely sacrifice my own happiness for the sake of being what after all could only prove a secondary comfort to him.

This was the question which I put to myself, when I was once more alone, in my own chamber, with my door bolted, and kneeling before God that I might be the better able to answer it in all sincerity,

Time was passing on rapidly, in a very few months I might expect, if not to see Roger in England, at least to receive my summons to Canada. Was I to say 'No' to it? Could I leave Roger to face loneliness in a distant land? After all he had done for me, would it not be selfish, ungrateful, to draw back and allow him to toil on, away from home, friends, every early association of happiness, to fall ill, perhaps, and die, and none to comfort him?

I wept most bitter tears as I conjured up the spectre of the evils which might be lurking in the dimness of futurity. But there was another side to the case. Roger was young, healthy, and full of hope; likely, as I had so often been told, to marry. He had not gone to Canada for me, but for himself. If he sent for me, it would be because I had no home but his. The tie between us was voluntary. If I were called upon to break it by a stronger claim, he would be the first to give it up.

And William was my brother also, an elder brother, suffering from a grief which Roger had never known. He had a household dependent upon him, and no one to manage it; duties incumbent upon him, which, without help, he would find the utmost difficulty in fulfilling; and he had been kind to me when I most needed it, he had taken me into his home when I had no other home. If I had not been happy there, it was from no intentional neglect on his part. He might be a selfish man, but he was never deliberately unkind. Could I put aside his claim as slight? It was the revival, in another form, of the difficulty which had so greatly troubled me when I left Dene; but it touched me more closely, for it was a question of separation, not for a year, but, probably, for ever.

God forgive me if I found the cross He had laid upon me too hard to bear; if, for a while, I again pondered the case, striving to escape from the decision of my conscience, and convince myself that Roger was to be my first consideration, and that it was less a question of my own wishes, than of the comparative happiness of my brothers. I was young then. I had made a duty to myself of my affections, and I had not learned that, unless supported by the claims of the work set before us by God, affection is not a duty but a temptation.

Before I had in any way reached the end of my deliberation, I was called down-stairs to speak with John Hervey. I had not seen him since the day of the funeral, but I had been expecting him constantly. He seemed now so much a part of ourselves

that I was comforted at the thought of talking to him, though I did not feel that I could ask his advice.

'How is it with you to-day, Ursie?' he said, kindly, as I entered the room, 'and how is William?'

'William is rather better,' I replied. 'He is in the fields looking after the men. Do you want him?'

'I can't do him any good, I am afraid. Time will do that through God's help; but I have a letter for you, Ursie.'

'A letter!' I jumped up and caught it from his hand. He turned away as I tore open the seal.

'DEAREST TROT,—I send you some hearty good wishes for Christmas-day, as I am writing to John Hervey upon a little business. You shall hear more soon. Lots of thanks for your last letter; nothing keeps a man up like hearing from home. We have had rather a bad time here. Mr Pierce has been very ill, and is so now, and I have been good for nothing myself. Please God, though, we get through this winter, we shall all be better off next. John will tell you about my work. I have not time for more. God bless you always, my little Trot. From your very loving brother,

ROGER GRANT.

'Love to William, and Leah, and all friends.'

I let the note fall upon my lap, and burst into tears. John Hervey drew near, frightened. 'Is it ill news?' he said, 'there was nothing particular in mine, except about Mr Pierce.'

I could not answer him, my tears came so fast. Perhaps it was the careless mention of Leah's name which had opened the flood-gates of my sorrow.

John took hold of the note, and I put it into his hand to read.

'He has been ill,' was the only remark he made upon it, 'but he tells me he is better.'

'He is not better,' I exclaimed, passionately, 'I know what he means by putting things in that light way. I must go to him and nurse him. He is nothing to you, Mr Hervey, but he is my all—my all!' I repeated; and it gave me a kind of fierce pleasure to feel that there was nothing in the world I loved like him.

'Perhaps you would like to see my letter,' said Mr Hervey; 'there doesn't seem much amiss from that, as far as Roger is concerned, though I should be afraid about Mr Pierce; and you

see he says that if anything were to happen to him, it might be a great drawback.'

I seized the paper almost without thanks. I would not let Mr Hervey read it to me. There was a pleasure in letting my eyes rest upon the letters which Roger had formed. I waded through two pages of farming business, understanding nothing; then I came to a few words about himself, less than what he had said to me. I found no comfort in them.

'He doesn't complain,' said John.

'He never does,' I replied.

'Spring will be coming soon,' he continued, 'the worst will be over.'

'And winter will be coming again,' I answered, 'but he won't spend it alone.'

'You are bent upon going to him, then,' said John, in rather an anxious tone.

'I am not only bent upon it, I must do it.'

'I thought you might have stayed a little while with William,' continued John. 'He will be much put to without you.'

I shrank from the suggestion. 'William will get a house-keeper,' I said; 'and Roger wants me, and I promised him to go.'

'And you wish it?' said John, and his eye rested upon me with an earnest gaze, which for the moment puzzled me.

'Yes,' I exclaimed, 'of course I wish it. Who is there that can be to me what Roger is? Who took care of me when I was a child, and gave me a home, and watched over me, and taught me? It was not William, Mr Hervey; you know that as well as I do. If he had been all I had to depend upon, I might have been at this time working for my bread in service, or starving upon dressmaking. If William wants me now, it is for his own good, not for mine.'

'There is certainly more gratitude due to Roger,' said Mr Hervey. He stressed the word gratitude. It fretted me.

'Gratitude!' I exclaimed. 'No, Mr Hervey, it is not gratitude. I am grateful to Farmer Kemp, to Mr Richardson, to you, to any one who has done me a kindness. I have something more than gratitude for Roger.'

'Don't trouble yourself to be grateful to me,' he said, gravely.

I scarcely heeded his words: 'You can't understand,' I exclaimed; 'no one can.'

'Yes,' he replied, in a tone of singular calmness, 'I can understand. You love Roger better than any one else in the world.'

'I love him better than my own life,' I said. 'I would be thankful to sacrifice every hour of my existence to him. I wish for nothing better than to live with him always. There are many kinds of love in this world, Mr Hervey, I don't see how we are to measure them. I only know that a sister's love for a brother may make earth a Paradise. Dene was my Paradise,' I added, in a lower tone.

I did not look at John Hervey as I spoke, my gaze was riveted upon Roger's letter.

When, however, John said, touching the paper, 'May I have it?' I gave it to him reluctantly, and then raising my eyes, I was for the first time struck with the expression of his face. It was strangely pale, and there was a look in it as though it had been cast into a mould—a kind of stony look. I did not like to ask him what was the matter. As he folded up the letter, he said to me, abruptly, 'I came over for another purpose. Miss Weir is going to France; I suppose you know it.'

'I had heard of it: I did not know it was a fixed plan.'

'I hear that she has engaged a servant, and has had directions from Mr Macdonald.'

'Miss Milicent is mad!' I exclaimed.

'Not far from it. She leaves her mother to Mrs Temple's care.'

'It will be safe care,' I said.

'It may be,' he replied.

I saw he was too proud to ask me again to interfere in any way; and I smiled and said, 'You want me to look after Mrs Weir, Mr Hervey, but you won't say so?'

'My wishes are not likely to weigh much with you, Ursie, I know,' was his reply; 'but if Miss Weir goes, Mrs Weir will be left without any friend.'

'Mrs Richardson,' I said.

'She will be left without any friend,' he repeated. 'Mrs Temple keeps her to herself.'

'But she likes it.'

'Perhaps she does, I can't say; but she seldom sees any one. Mrs Richardson is constantly denied admittance.'

'For what purpose?' I exclaimed. 'It can do no harm to any one.'

'You women are strange beings,' he replied; 'you are all fond of power.'

'Because you men give us so little of it,' I said; 'what is rare is always precious.'

'O Ursie!' he exclaimed, and he caught hold of my hand; 'you have a great deal more power than you know,—if you were only able'—

'To do what?'

'To use it rightly,—kindly, I mean.'

I laughed a little, and said I would come to him for instructions. It seemed odd that I could laugh. I was not in the least happy in the depths of my heart; but laughter lies on the surface. We had some more conversation after that about many things. John told me little about Miss Milicent that I did not know except that the fact of her journey was actually settled. She had not come to him for any help, he said; she had gone entirely her own way. I suppose it was her pride, and the consciousness that her friends disapproved, which prevented her from consulting any one; nothing else that I can imagine would have induced her to have frequent interviews with such a man as Lieutenant Macdonald. He, it seems, besides telling her where Mr Weir was, had given her some instructions as to her journey; and this kind of business had taken her frequently to Dene, where Mrs Price made a great deal of her. So strange it was that Miss Milicent could bear it! But I have lived to wonder at nothing I see in the way of intimacies. All indulged faults bring us sooner or later to humiliation of some kind. Miss Milicent's self-will and pride made her take rather a pleasure, I suspect, in going contrary to the opinion of the world. She thought she showed her contempt for it in this way; but we do not take trouble to oppose what we despise. I don't mean by this that Miss Milicent was intimate with Mrs Price, but only that she bore to meet her upon a footing of equality. I inquired anxiously about Mr Macdonald, and was thankful to find that he was to leave Dene in a few days. Our late trouble had put thoughts of Jessie out of my mind, but they were returning again, with the more force, because I felt myself to be in a measure holding Leah's place. Jessie had written a refusal, so she assured me; I did not doubt her word, and yet I had a lingering misgiving. The one thing which Jessie could never be made to understand was, that she had no right to indulge her vanity, by having a double mind in these matters; she might refuse Mr Macdonald, but I was

not at all sure that she would not continue to flirt with him, and of course in such a case a refusal would go for nothing ; especially as I had reason to believe that Mr Macdonald sought Jessie for something besides her beauty ; it being confidently believed by many people that Mrs Morris was very rich, and meant to leave Jessie a good sum of money. I was so anxious to hear of his departure, that John promised to let me know as soon as he was gone. I believe John thought I only wished him away, because of his interference in Mrs Weir's affairs. We separated after having been together more than an hour. Just before John left me, I said, ' You are going to write to Roger ?'

' Yes,' was his reply, ' and so are you.' He went to the door, came back again and added, ' Ursie, we don't always see things rightly when we have a strong wish.'

I knew that better perhaps than he could tell me. When I found myself alone, I took a sheet of paper, and wrote a long letter to Roger, telling him that I must give up all hope of joining him at present. How I had arrived at the conclusion, I don't know. I believe it was through contact with an honest mind.

CHAPTER XLII.

IF William and I had in the least understood each other, we could never have gone on as we did during the next few weeks. We were both very unhappy, but if we had explained the cause of our unhappiness, we must inevitably have quarrelled and separated. As it was, we lived lives apart, but without disagreement. The very absence of anything like real sympathy enabled us to avoid the subjects which would have jarred, for we kept upon the surface of all things. In my self-conceit, believing that I had more thought, intellect, and principle than Leah, I imagined at first that I could eventually fill her position, even in William's estimation, for his love for his wife was by no means an overpowering affection ; but I was soon convinced to the contrary. As there is ' a time for every purpose under the heaven,' so I believe there is also a place for every person. The great man cannot fill the little man's position ; self-sacrifice cannot make up for the absence of congeniality. Not that I

was great, nor that my life was one of self-sacrifice. I only used the expressions by way of illustration. Leah's likings and dislikes, her pleasures and pains, even her temper and fancies, were part of William's home associations, and therefore necessary to him. I believe I actually fretted him by trying to make no complaint of the servants, nor to say sharp things of my neighbours. The watchfulness which I was striving to acquire was stagnation to him, and I was too sad at heart to be able to cheer him by talking much upon other subjects. I had Jessie Lee with me whenever she could be spared, as much for William's sake as for my own. The meals and the evenings were so quiet and silent, I was thankful to have some one to bring forward new subjects of conversation, and Jessie was generally bright and amusing in her way, and seemed glad to be with me. She was not, however, in her usual spirits, but that could scarcely be expected, for she was very affectionate, and felt Leah's death extremely. Whether there was any other cause of melancholy I could not make out. As to Stonecliff, there was still the same talk, week after week, of Miss Milicent's going abroad, but the journey was always put off. When a woman will follow her own fashions, instead of those marked out for her by the common sense of others, it is surprising what a mine of difficulties she is likely to sink into. No one without seeing would have believed the fancies which Miss Milicent gave way to respecting her French journey; whims about her boxes, her dresses, which way she was to go, how she was to guard against the weather—it was as if she was the first person who had ever crossed over to France. She took it into her head to come frequently to Sandcombe, under pretence of asking me what I thought about her plans, but not in the least meaning to listen to what I said. She took up a good deal of my time in that way, but I did not care so much for that. I had always a very kindly feeling towards her, but what I did dislike was the frequent mention of Lieutenant Macdonald's name in Jessie's presence. There is nothing like talking of people to keep up an interest. Even if disagreeable things are said, it helps to retain them in one's recollection, and gives one a kind of interest in them; and Miss Milicent, of course, could not always be complaining of the Lieutenant's habits and character. Most frequently she spoke of him in reference to some information he had given her, and then I saw Jessie colour up, and listen eagerly. Once or twice, too, Miss Milicent had taken

Jessie over to Dene with her, because she said she liked a companion, and this kept up the Dene intimacy; and, moreover, at last, Mrs Price actually came and called upon me, pretending she was bound to return the visit I had paid with Miss Milicent. I could not understand that in the least, until John Hervey put me up to it. 'Mrs Price,' he said, 'is not noticed by any of the country gentlemen's families, and, as she finds Dene dull without company, she falls back upon her old friends.' I was not flattered by the reason, but it did not trouble me much, I was not bound to return the visit, and I never did.

It was March before Miss Milicent was ready to set off on her expedition. Up to that time I had only twice been at Stonecliff, and then had not been permitted to see Mrs Weir. I had tried, however, to show that I thought of her by sending her little presents of fresh eggs and vegetables. I hoped she had them and knew they came from me, but Miss Milicent always seemed in a mist as to what was done with them, or indeed with anything which once entered the house at Stonecliff. The second week in March, as I was in the kitchen putting up a little basket of things to be left for Mrs Weir by Esther Smithson on her way home in the evening, William came in from the fields looking very serious, and said to me, 'Do you know, Ursie, I have had bad news. I can't make out whether it is quite true, but our Hatton boy says that Mrs Morris is very ill. Have you heard it?'

'No,' I replied; 'and we should have heard it certainly. There can't be anything in it.'

'I should think not,' he answered; 'but Will declares that his father was sent off to Hove for Mr Sutton.'

'Suppose you ride over and see,' I said; 'it would be the shortest way.'

William was of a perverse disposition; he never liked having things suggested to him. 'I don't know about leaving the men,' he replied; 'they always go wrong when I'm away.'

'Well, then, wait till they come in to their dinner,' I said, 'As for your own, they will give you some at Hatton.'

'Not if the old lady is ill,' was his answer. 'There will be no one to get it.'

'I could go myself, if you liked it,' I observed.

He went to the window and looked out. 'The clouds are coming up very stormy away to the west; you can't walk.'

'But I could be driven,' I said, 'if you could spare Joe Good-enough for the chaise.'

'Just what I can't do as it happens. I have sent Joe Good-enough to Hove.'

'Well, if it is so, we must even wait,' was my answer. 'Ill news flies apace, so if there is anything amiss, we may be sure it will reach us before night.'

'Wait and get a character for unfeelingness all round the country,' replied William. 'I don't want to do that. I shall see about it. I suppose I must try and go myself.'

He went off to do what I was sure from the beginning he meant to do. I should have preferred going myself, for if Mrs Morris was ill, I was more likely than William to be a comfort to her. But what he said about walking was very true. I should certainly be caught in a storm. The kitchen window looked to the west, and over St Anne's Hill and the reach of down below it the clouds were like ink. There was a driving wind, which perhaps might serve to keep the rain off for a time, but it was sure to fall heavily before many hours were over. I went out after William, to beg him to put on his greatcoat, but he would not listen to me, though he shivered as he stood talking to one of his men, and said it was bitterly cold. I saw him set off, and warned him to make haste back; the sky looked more threatening than ever, but it tempted me to go to the top of the lane, that I might see it gathering over the sea. I walked by the side of William's horse, telling him to be sure and bring back word if Jessie was uneasy, and if I could be of any use; and after watching him across the down till he was out of sight, I stood still and looked round me. It was a glorious sight from the top of the hill. The waves were tossing furiously in the bay; the white breakers glittering for a moment, as the sun pierced the masses of clouds, and then disappearing beneath the heavy shadows which swept over the sea, covered the cliffs, and rushed across the land, like demons of darkness.

From infancy it had been a delight to me to watch a storm; even thunder and lightning excited far more than frightened me. The spectacle of the vast Power over which human beings had no control, raised my thoughts above earth. It was as though I was no longer the weak, ignorant girl, of no account even in the eyes of my fellow-creatures, but a being of a higher race, permitted to draw near and watch the wonderful workings of God's Wisdom. The feeling had been encouraged by Roger. Often,

as we stood together in former days upon St Anne's Hill, when the rough winter winds were rushing past us, I have heard him murmur to himself the verses in the Psalms which speak of 'the Lord that commandeth the waters : ' 'the glorious God, that maketh the thunder.'

The words came back to me now ; and as I looked at the wild waves breaking upon the line of red shingles, I continued them aloud : 'It is the Lord that ruleth the sea ; the voice of the Lord is mighty in operation : the voice of the Lord is a glorious Voice.'

'Is it you, Ursie Grant?' said some one, tapping me on the shoulder.

'Miss Milicent ! I beg your pardon ; I didn't see you.

'How should you ? I came from behind. What are you doing here ?'

'Watching the storm,' I said ; 'it will soon come to us.'

'But not stay, I hope. I go to-morrow, Ursie.'

'Not in such weather, surely !' I exclaimed.

'Yes, Ursie ; I must be off anyhow.'

'O Miss Milicent ! are you right ?'

'I don't know ; I must do what I have set my mind to do ; and what does it signify, Ursie ? storm or no storm, one shall reach the end somehow.'

Her tone was so excited, that I turned to look at her with anxiety.

'When we do what is put before us, we needn't be afraid, I suppose,' she continued ; 'and if the end cuts us short, it is God's will, and no matter whether it be by storm or fever.'

'I should be glad, though, to feel that I was doing His work,' I replied ; 'but that is the doubt to me very often, Miss Milicent.'

She stopped before answering. 'Do you often doubt, Ursie, she said, 'really doubt ?'

'Very often,' I replied ; 'I think at the time I am right. When I look back, I see I was wrong.'

'That can't be a pleasant discovery,' she replied, thoughtfully.

'No,' I said ; 'but it has come upon me more frequently than usual of late. Death makes us think, Miss Milicent, whether we will or not.'

'It is the end of the storm,' she said, and a singular look of awe crossed her face. 'Ursie, if I were never to come back, what should you say of me ?'

An exclamation of pain at the idea escaped me. She stopped me short. 'No matter for the thought, Ursie; I am not a bit nearer to it for uttering it. What should you say of me?'

'In what way, Miss Milicent?' I asked. 'You have been a good friend to me always.'

'Pshaw!' she exclaimed, impatiently. 'What is being a good friend? I have not beaten you nor turned you out of doors,—that's all. Would you say, Ursie, that I had gone the right way through life?'

'I think you wish to go, Miss Milicent, as I wish it myself.'

'I think you wish to go!' she repeated. 'I don't think you have gone, that means. Ursie, you are a coward and a humbug like other people.'

'It is not my place,' I began—but she would not hear me.

'It is your place to answer my questions, if it is my will to put them. What does place mean, Ursie? Look!' and, as a large drop of rain, the beginning of the storm, fell upon her hand, she thrust it before me;—'God's warnings touch all alike; there is but one place before Him.'

I was greatly touched by her earnestness. I longed to speak to her freely, but the difficulty I felt was insurmountable. As in so many other cases she had committed herself to a certain course of action, and now sought for approval. I was not the person to give her sanction or to condemn her.

She waited patiently; so patiently, indeed, with her large, fierce eyes softened by an expression of suspense, that the very consciousness of her presence took from me the power of thinking correctly. I really could not answer her; I scarcely knew, indeed, what she wished or desired me to say.

'Miss Milicent,' I replied at last, 'if you really want help in these matters, there are persons much more fitted than I am to give it.'

'I don't want help!' she exclaimed; 'I want only truth. Good-bye, Ursie. I shan't get it from you.'

'O Miss Milicent!' I exclaimed, and I took hold of her dress as she turned from me; but she would not be detained. When she hurried away, I saw her put her shawl over her bonnet to shelter herself from the rain which was beginning to fall fast, and as I turned to descend the hill, I lost sight of her completely.

CHAPTER XLIII.

OFTEN and often, in looking back upon that conversation, I have blamed myself for not taking advantage of the opportunity afforded me of speaking freely to Miss Milicent upon the mistakes I felt she was making. And yet, if I could place myself again in the same position, I doubt whether I could bring myself to act differently. What is fitting is such a strong instinct in us all, unless we have been spoiled by education. Miss Milicent had no right to make me her judge and reprover; though, if she had waited but a few minutes longer, I think I might by degrees have felt encouraged to state my opinion more openly. As it was, I felt that she would throw upon me the blame of having been too cowardly to advise her. What had brought her to such a state of mind now I could only guess. She was coming from Compton; it was probable that some conversation with Mr Richardson had made her angry and yet touched her conscience. I knew through Mrs Kemp, that from the beginning he had told her she was forming foolish plans by herself. Most likely he had been making a last effort to bring her to reason, and wishing to find some support for her own wilfulness, she had turned to me. I was uncomfortable when I reached home, and thought a good deal about her as I took my solitary dinner; but I was too busy afterwards to dwell upon the subject, except when the wind rose higher, and I remembered what she had said about the next day, and wondered whether she would still persist in her determination to go, whatever might be the state of the weather.

There was one person, however, whom no press of business could drive from my recollection. We were expecting letters from Roger, the first that could have arrived since he had heard of Leah's death. I did not believe they would come that evening. They could not, unless some one brought them out from Hove, and I knew no one had been sent in; but the bare possibility agitated me. As the afternoon closed in, and the wind went down, and the rain turned first into sleet, and then into a heavy fall of snow, I drew my chair near the fire, waiting for, and expecting William's return; and whilst I worked busily with my fingers, occupied myself with anxious thoughts of Roger in his distant Canadian home, and, I am afraid, with many other anxious and repining fancies, sufficient, if I had examined them,

to prove to me that my own mind was far too undisciplined to allow of my attempting to discipline Miss Milicent's.

By half-past five it was so dark that I lighted a candle, which made everything beyond its own sphere darker. I wished William would come, and began to be afraid that he was really detained by Mrs Morris's illness. When I listened for his horse's steps, I heard nothing but the low moaning of the wind, as it drifted the snow-flakes to the earth, and the solemn groundswell, betokening the worst weather was at hand. I grew nervous at last. The candle flickered as draughts of air made their way through the closed shutters of the old windows, and then the shadows on the wall seemed to move, and I fancied the door was opened, and when I went to close it I caught, as I imagined, a murmur of strange voices by the front stairs, and stole along the stone passage to listen, and hear nothing; and made my way back again with the feeling that I ought not to be alone, that I must find some one in the parlour waiting for me—Leah used to be there.

I was ashamed of such fancies,—I felt they were wrong. I thought I would read a Psalm to myself and chase them away, and I turned to that which had been so vividly brought before me on that very day. I read it aloud to myself,—again I came to the words, 'it is the Lord that ruleth the sea,' when a sound struck me—a sound once heard, never to be forgotten—the faint but heavy booming of a gun,—a signal from a ship in distress.

It was not unusual. There were many wrecks in the winter season. The coast had been known as dangerous from the days when the old monks lighted their beacons on the summit of St Anne's, and prayed that God would protect His servants in perils of waters. More than ever, I wished that William was at home; he would have sent off his men to the shore instantly, probably even he might have gone with them, for he was kind-hearted when roused by any urgent call. I did not like to take the responsibility of sending the men myself, and yet I could not endure the idea of sitting still and doing nothing, and, in my restlessness, I went out to the front door to listen again. Another booming sound reached my ears. I could bear it no longer, and as the figure of a man, at that instant, crossed the yard in the dusk, I ran out to stop him. 'I must speak to you,' I exclaimed, 'come in; do you hear the gun?' and I touched him, thinking to gain his attention. He made no answer. 'Do

you hear it?' I repeated. Still there was no reply, but he followed me into the house. I stopped at the door. There was a faint light in the passage from the fire in the kitchen. 'Is it you, Joe Goodenough?' I said. The man laid his hand upon mine, and as I started back, a voice, half-laughing, half-trembling with agitation, said, 'Not Joe, my little Trot, but Roger!'

I don't think I screamed. I am quite sure I did not faint. I remember that I led Roger into the parlour, and took off his greatcoat, and put him into the arm-chair, and sat myself down beside him, even as if we had been parted only for a few hours, and never till then asked him the question where he came from, and what brought him. Once with me, and all seemed natural. He inquired hastily about William, and seemed very anxious to know how things were going on, and then he said, 'Mr Pierce is dead, Trot; I am come home at his last request. That is one thing. Poor Leah's death is another.'

I knew all that was contained in the last sentence. He had thought of me. I answered, 'There have been terrible changes. We feared Mr Pierce might die.'

'Yes, it has been a grievous business. He was not fitted for the climate or the work. I hope I was a comfort to him. But you have had a hard time too, my little Trot, my precious little woman.' He seized me with his old bear's hug, and I felt tears drop upon my cheek; we could neither of us trust ourselves to say more just then. He had landed only that day, and had had little to eat. I went out to order something for him, and came back again to ask him about the ship; should any one be sent off? He satisfied my mind. As he came off the down he had met people going across. There would be sufficient help. The night was calm, though dark, and he did not think I need be uneasy.

Oh! the blessing of resting upon another instead of deciding for one's self. Women may like power, but I can never believe that it is in their nature to like the responsibility which goes with it. I told Martha to get tea quickly, and would have gone away myself to hurry her, but Roger was just as he used to be, so patient about his own comfort. He should like a biscuit and a glass of wine, he said, and then he would wait till William came. We would have tea together. 'Home faces are better than tea,' he remarked, as he grasped my hand, and held it tight. 'O Ursie! there's nothing like Old England after all.'

We spoke of Leah then. He felt so tenderly about her. I

saw he could not reconcile himself to Sandcombe without her. His loving heart seemed to have no power of retaining disagreeable impressions of any one living, much less of the dead. To hear him talk of his oid neighbours and acquaintances, even of the Shaws and Prices, one might have thought that they had been conferring favours upon him all his life.

People had been very kind to him in Canada, he said, and he had no doubt that if he chose to go back he should do well. But the necessary exposure to the intense cold during this first winter, and the anxiety about Mr Pierce, had tried him greatly. The voyage home had done him good, and he was looking well, but this first experience of exile had not been quite successful. As he went more into details about his own affairs, I found that Leah's death had in some way affected his money arrangements with William, and there was a question about laying out his little capital in Canada, which could not well be determined until he had had a communication with William. 'So you see I had more reasons than one for returning, Ursie,' he said; 'and as poor Mr Pierce took care to provide me with the means, I thought I shouldn't be wrong, though I felt it was following my own wishes. I had a longing'—

'To see me,' I said, as I looked up at him eagerly. He patted my cheek and laughed; but a grave look came over his face, and directly afterwards, he went on saying something about Leah. I knew as well as possible all that passed through his mind; it was what passed through mine likewise. We could not part perhaps for ever without one more meeting.

We waited till seven o'clock, and still William did not come. I made Roger have his tea then, and in my happiness did not think of being uneasy about William, only I was impatient that he should see Roger. But when the clock struck nine, I did really think it very strange, and I agreed to Roger's proposal, that he should go up to the top of the hill and call out. The night was pitch dark, and the snow still falling, and in spite of William's knowledge of the tracks over the down, it was not at all impossible that he might lose his way. I could not help being amused at the contemptuous tone in which Roger spoke of the weather. 'What was English cold?' he said, as I helped him on with his greatcoat, but he knew how to wrap himself up uncommonly well, and went out pleased, I am sure, rather than not at having to encounter his old enemy.

Not above ten minutes afterwards, I heard quite a chorus of men's voices in the entrance. William was there and Roger, and there were one or two others besides. But they were merry enough, and I was satisfied there was nothing amiss. The men went into the kitchen, William came into the parlour, blinking at the light, and putting a handkerchief to his eyes, but with his hand resting upon Roger's shoulder, and asking him more questions than could by any possibility be answered. 'He was lost,' said Roger, laughing heartily. 'You would not believe it, Ursie, but he was.'

'And frightened out of my senses when I was found,' exclaimed William. 'What was I to make of it, Ursie, when I heard a man, who I thought hundreds of miles away, hallooing close at my side in the dark? I would walk fifty miles, and be present at a hundred shipwrecks, before I would have such a fright again. But welcome for all that, my good fellow,' and he shook Roger's hand till I thought it would have come off.

'Then there has been a shipwreck?' I inquired, anxiously.

'A wreck, but no lives lost. Heaps of oranges for the Hatton people to feast on to-morrow, and plenty of salt water to give them a pleasant flavour. I should have been back here three hours ago but for the wreck. It was bitter work down on the shore; and the wind seems to have caught my eyes, they smart terribly.'

'And how did you find Mrs Morris?' I asked.

'Baddish, very bad, Jessie says. I didn't see her. The doctors think it is a break up.'

'Poor Jessie!' I exclaimed. 'Did you tell her I would go over to her any moment?'

'She does not want help, so she declares, but I promised her you should be there to-morrow. She is not a girl to be left to herself in a difficulty.'

'I could drive you over, Ursie,' said Roger.

'Yes,' I said, carelessly; 'but, William, who are those men in the kitchen?'

'Crompton fellows, who were down on the shore helping about the wreck. We were all going wrong together when Roger hailed us. 'It's his doing, having them in and giving them a glass of ale. I am not given to such extravagance, Ursie,' and William laughed the first hearty laugh I had heard since Leah's death.

I went out to the men myself to see they had everything com-

fortable. They were making a hearty supper, and it did my heart good to see something like the old Sandcombe hospitality, which I used to hear of in my young days. They were not gone till nearly ten o'clock. When I went back to the parlour I found William and Roger sitting over the fire, deep in business already. Roger started up as I put a candle before him, and told him it was time to go to bed.

'Time! not yet, Trot; why the evening is just begun.'

'It is time, though,' I said, 'for folks who must get up with the cock-crowing.'

He lingered a little, thinking. 'Trot, you and I used to thank God for taking care of us before we went to bed. I have come through a rough time lately. What do you say, William; mightn't we have prayers?'

William was taken so by surprise he could not object, and I don't believe he wished it. I stepped out of the room, and called Martha, and we all knelt down, and Roger said some of the prayers from the evening service, and thanked God for bringing him safe home. That was the first beginning of family prayer at Sandcombe.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE first waking the next morning would have repaid me for double the pain I had suffered since Roger's absence. It was so wonderfully happy. My nature was not one to dwell long on future troubles, so I took the blessings brought by the present moment, and only felt that Roger was with me, and that for the time all must go well. And my feeling was shared by every one in the house. Roger's return was like letting the light of the sun break in upon our sad household. William expanded, as it were, under its influence in a manner which was surprising to me; especially as he had a good deal to make him uncomfortable in other ways. I mentioned that the evening of the wreck he came in shading his face from the light, and putting a handkerchief to his eyes. All that evening he complained of a shooting pain in them, and the next day they were very much inflamed. He had caught cold in them; for in consequence of being so silly as not to take a greatcoat with him, he had no defence against the

snow, and he had been exposed to it a long time. We forced him to send for the Compton doctor; but the lotion which was ordered did no good, and then he said he would see some one in Hove. Instead, however, of letting the doctor come to him, he would go into Hove himself on a day when there was a bitter wind blowing, and of course he returned worse than he went. These things were very vexatious, but I could talk out my troubles to Roger, and that was sufficient comfort to me for the time. The accounts from Hatton continued very indifferent. Mrs Morris kept her bed, and Jessie was in constant attendance upon her. Roger and I saw Jessie for a short time the day he drove me over, and she was very pleasant in her behaviour to both of us,—very glad to see Roger, and full of thanks for our coming; but her mind was so engrossed by all the cares pressing upon her, that she did not seem to take in anything else thoroughly. I thought myself how much prettier and more winning she was in this subdued mood than in any of her wilful humours, and I was pleased that Roger should see her to advantage, even though her manner contradicted some of the things I had lately written to him about her. Jessie told me that day that Miss Milicent was actually gone. She had learned it from some one who came over from Dene, and said that Mr Macdonald knew it for certain. There was a great deal too much communication kept up still between Dene and Jessie and the lieutenant. I did not feel at all easy in my mind as to the end.

After Jessie's information, I resolved to make an effort to go and see Mrs Weir, even at the risk of facing Mrs Temple, and perhaps offending her. It was a little pleasure to me also whilst Roger was away, for he was obliged to go to London for a few days to see Mr Pierce's relations. Yet I did not feel comfortable in thinking what kind of reception I might meet with, and I was rather nervous as I rang the bell. The page opened the door, and I asked if I might see Mrs Weir. He did not know—he would go and see—and he ran off. I stood looking down the road, and saw Mrs Temple coming up. She was going on beyond the house, but on perceiving me she drew near. I made a curtsy, and said I had walked over to inquire after Mrs Weir.

'Oh! Mrs Weir is not at all well to-day.'

'I was afraid she might not be, ma'am,' I replied. 'Parting with Miss Milicent must have made her anxious.'

'Mrs Weir is too excellent a person to allow herself to be

anxious upon any subject,' was the answer. 'I will tell her that you called.'

'I had hoped that I might have seen her, ma'am,' I said. 'Having been accustomed to me so long, I fancied it would not make her nervous.'

'Mrs Weir sees no one but her friends,' was Mrs Temple's answer; 'I will tell her that you called to inquire, and no doubt she will be much obliged to you.'

Just then Mr Temple and some strange gentlemen came up, and Mr Temple asked his wife if she was going on farther. I saw she disliked leaving me at the door, and again she repeated, 'I will tell Mrs Weir that you called,'—which was as much as to say, 'You have come, and now you may go back again,' but I kept my stand, waiting for the answer from Mrs Weir herself.

'Are you ready, my dear?' said Mr Temple, in his meek voice, and he offered her his arm: she really had no excuse then, and was obliged to depart.

The page came back almost directly afterwards, followed by Cotton. He began telling me that Mrs Weir was very ill, that she had had a bad night, that she did not see any one,—but Cotton gave him a tap on the shoulder, and sent him off to the kitchen, and, even before he was out of sight, exclaimed, 'Little rascal!—he would say his face was copper-coloured for six-pence!'

'Isn't Mrs Weir ill?' I said. 'Can she see me?'

Cotton replied by stepping out into the road, and looking up and down it.

'She is gone. That is her purple bonnet. Now, Miss Grant, if you wish to come, you must make the most of your time.'

'What does it mean, Cotton?' I exclaimed, 'I don't understand.'

'Don't ask questions, and you won't have answers. At any rate, seeing you will do my mistress good, for yours will be the first face belonging to any one out of the house that she has caught sight of for the last three weeks'

'Has she been so ill as that?' I inquired.

'Only learning to be quiet, she will tell you,' said Cotton. 'Before I would put up with such folly! But we aren't all made alike, that is one blessing.'

I followed her, greatly perplexed and pained.

'Mrs Weir's sitting-room was wanted for any stray visitors, whispered Cotton to me, as she saw me look round the lobby at

the head of the stairs, not quite knowing where I was to be taken to. 'She has Mr Temple's little dressing-room fitted up for her now, and her bedroom is along the passage to the right.'

'It is not comfortable for her, is it?' I asked; and Cotton shrugged her shoulders, and answered, 'We must like what is given us, when we are not mistresses in our own house.'

Mrs Weir looked a least a year older since the last time I had seen her. Her complexion, naturally so singularly clear and smooth, had become withered and sallow, and her eyes were heavy; but she was much more self-controlled, and if I could have felt that her appearance and manner were natural, I might have fancied there was a change for the better.

'You find me in a new room, Ursula,' she said, as Cotton left us, and I sat down beside her. 'It must seem strange to you.'

Yes, it was very strange, so cold-looking, and comfortless! Nothing but Mrs Weir's work-basket, and a Bible on the table; no flowers even to brighten it.

'I have been here since Milicent left me,' she continued. 'My niece wished me to be near her; and she has friends coming to see her, so that the house will be full.'

'It doesn't look like your room, certainly, ma'am,' I replied.

'You miss the little ornaments; but they were better in the visitors' room; and, you know, Ursula, all things increase in value when they give pleasure to others.'

'This room is very small, ma'am,' I observed, 'and I am afraid you will feel the draught from the door.'

'My niece has lent me a thick shawl, and I put it on when I feel the cold. You see, Ursula, I am not fit to travel, because I do feel things so much. My niece tells me that.'

Her voice faltered a little, and I heard her murmur to herself, 'It is right: God help me; it is all right.'

'You will be better, ma'am, when you have heard from Miss Milicent,' I said; 'her being away must make you anxious.'

'I ought not to be anxious, Ursula. I have so many blessings; and I could not go. Milicent will do without me—she always does without me, but it is lonely, and I wish'—she did not finish the sentence.

'What do you wish, dear ma'am?' I asked.

'Nothing, Ursula. God has taught me that I must have no wishes,' and Mrs Weir folded her little hands together, as a child would do in prayer.

‘Only perhaps it would do you good, just to say out your wish, ma’am,’ I said; ‘even if you don’t think it right to encourage it.’

‘No, Ursula; no wishes, no longings.’

‘Some, dear ma’am,’ I exclaimed, ‘some we must have, whilst we live upon earth.’

‘If God would grant me to see my duty clearly,’ she answered; ‘I try to understand what they tell me—yes, I try. But, Ursula, a wife has a great duty to a husband.’

‘No one would wish you to go to Mr Weir now, ma’am,’ I answered.

‘That is what is said. Is it true, Ursula? I made a vow once. Does God forget our vows?’

‘He does not wish us to do what is impossible, ma’am,’ I replied, ‘and your friends judge rightly, I am sure, in telling you that you would do harm to yourself, and no good to Mr Weir, by insisting upon joining him.’

‘You say so, do you? you are like them all, but I forgot—I am to be quiet. Cotton ought not to have brought you here, it was wrong. My niece would not like me to see you, and she knows what is best. But I am quiet—only if they would tell me why they allowed Millicent to go without me. Ursula, I will pray. God will help me if I pray.’

All the assumed self-control was over. Her hands trembled violently. I took hold of them to keep them still, but she did not seem to think of my presence as, with her eyes closed, she poured out her prayer with all the simplicity of a child, and the earnestness and devotion of a saint. She prayed for submission, for guidance, for humility, and charity. I could with difficulty follow the course of her thoughts. There seemed to be a burden upon her heart, which she could scarcely find words to express.

After a few moments she lay back upon the sofa. I thought she was faint, and offered her a bottle of salts, but she would not take it. ‘No, Ursula,’ she said, ‘I am better now, I will not talk any more; and you had better go.’

‘I can’t leave you alone, ma’am,’ I replied.

‘Cotton will come to me, and my niece will return. I would rather, Ursula.’

‘Rather,’ meant duty, not inclination, I was sure, and I felt very determined. ‘I was in hopes, ma’am,’ I said, ‘that I might have stayed a little with you to tell you about my brother Roger—the one who went to Canada, you know—he is come back.’

Her eyes quite brightened at this little bit of news from the outer world. She said eagerly, 'O Ursula! that must be very pleasant; will you not tell me about it? Was that why you did not come to see me? My niece thought you had forgotten me.'

'I have had a great deal of trouble, ma'am,' I said, and I began to give her an account of Leah's illness, lengthening out what I had to say, so as to gain her attention thoroughly, and it was quite curious to me to watch the effect my little story had upon her. She laid her hand upon mine when I spoke of the sorrow that had come upon us, smoothing it kindly, and looking at me at the same time intently, and though she grieved with me, and tears stood in her eyes, yet the haggard look passed from her face, until I told her how I had watched Leah, and nursed her, and been with her at her death. Then it came back again most painfully, and she said, 'You have done all you could, Ursula; you have nothing on your conscience, and now God has sent you a reward.' The words gave me a pang, as I thought how little they were deserved. I changed the subject, knowing what was in her thoughts, and spoke of Roger, but I could not seize upon her attention again, and as she looked towards the door nervously, I felt that I had been there long enough.

I rose to go, promising to come and see her again, but I had no response. It almost seemed that she wished me not to come, for she only said, 'Yes, Ursula, when you have time; but you are very busy, and you have your brother.'

I did not notice the change in her manner, and insisted upon placing the cushions comfortably, and throwing a shawl over her, as in the good old days at Dene. Just as I was leaving the room I said, 'I think I must send you over a few crocusses and snowdrops, ma'am, from Sandcombe. You don't seem to have any, and you used to like them so much.'

'O Ursula! thank you, indeed that will be so kind; but my niece would like some for the visitors' room, if you could spare them. She says we must all try and make that pretty and comfortable for her friends.' I made no more offers. If it had been possible to be angry with Mrs Weir, I think I should have been then.

Cotton was keeping guard in the lobby. I was going down stairs, but she hurried me away to her own room—a little attic.

'I shall get into a scrape for this,' she said; 'but I couldn't help it. I couldn't bear it any longer by myself.'

'I don't understand it all,' I said.

'How should you, or any one who doesn't live in the house? I thought Mr Richardson might have been of use, but she's too much for him.'

'She! who? Mrs Weir?'

'No, no; how foolish! Mrs Temple. She keeps him at arm's length. Ever since Miss Milicent went has he been trying to get in, and never succeeded once.'

'But why not?' I exclaimed; 'why shouldn't he come?'

'Just sit down, and I'll tell you;' and Cotton gave me a chair and seated herself on a trunk, delighted, as I perceived, to have some one to whom to pour out her troubles. It seemed that ever since the first news had been heard of Mr Weir, Mrs Weir's nervousness and fidgets, as Cotton called them, had increased tenfold. It was the old feeling which we had battled with at Dene, only much more vehement. Mrs Weir could never have loved her husband, latterly she must have been very unhappy with him; yet she had kept herself up by the one principle, which was, in fact, all the strength of mind she possessed,—a sense of religious duty. But for this she might long ago have been considered incapable of judgment upon any subject. I suppose, naturally enough in her state of health, the principle had become exaggerated. She was morbid in her conscientiousness, but still it was the only thing to rest upon in dealing with her. In the present instance I gathered from what Cotton said, that she might have been managed easily enough but for Miss Milicent's wilfulness. If any one else had been sent to find Mr Weir, and inquire into his condition, Mrs Weir would, at least for a while, have been satisfied; but the moment Miss Milicent talked of going, Mrs Weir became excited, and said she must go too,—and the idea so possessed her that it became a kind of monomania.

'I should have given in to her,' I exclaimed, as Cotton told me this.

'So should I,' she replied. 'Mrs Weir is just one of those odd, nervous persons, who can do wonderful things when they have their own way, and can't stir an inch when they have not. I heard Mr Richardson say this myself to Mrs Temple. He did all he could to keep Miss Milicent from her wild scheme, and I know he put before her the harm all the fuss was doing her mother,—but you might as well have talked to a stone wall; and then he took the other tack, and turned to Mrs Temple,

hoping something might be managed to satisfy Mrs Weir,—and there was another stone wall.'

'He must have had enough to do with them all,' I said.

'You would think so if you had known everything that went on; how we used to be kept up, night after night—Mrs Temple preaching to my poor mistress about patience, and trying her so that she must have been better than Job if she had not been impatient, and at last sending her off into hysterics; and Miss Millicent coming in in the middle, with worries about her boxes, and what she should take, and what she should leave behind, and never seeing that the very mention of packing set Mrs Weir off worse than ever.'

'Mrs Weir is quiet enough, now,' I said.

'Hasn't she been tutored,—fairly tutored and trained into it? But the trouble is not over.'

'I suppose Mrs Temple did only what she thought was for the best,' I said.

Cotton gave a little contemptuous laugh. 'Why, Miss Grant, you are not taken in by her, are you? She thinks it the best for herself that Mrs Weir should stay, there is no doubt of that. If she did not, my poor mistress would have been off for France, or for Australia, or for any other country, by the next packet.'

'I don't precisely see what good it can do Mrs Temple to have Mrs Weir here,' I said, 'she can be only a trouble.'

'There is a house to be kept up,' replied Cotton.

'Yes,' I said, 'but Mrs Weir's income is very small.'

'Not so small but that it helps Mrs Temple pretty considerably; that I know from good authority,' continued Cotton. 'And just see in what a style we have things—footman, and page, and pony-carriage, and gardener. Mrs Temple didn't live in that way in her own home, and she would not live so here, if it was not for Mrs Weir's help. She has all the money in her own hands, and she doesn't choose it should go out of them.'

'Still,' I said, not choosing to own to Cotton how much I agreed as to her opinion of Mrs Temple, 'it was best for Mrs Weir to stay.'

'That may or mayn't be,' replied Cotton. 'As you yourself said just now, Miss Grant, when her heart was so set upon it, I should have run the risk. But I wouldn't quarrel about the plan, only the way it has been managed. If ever there was a hard gaoler, it's Mrs Temple. You must have seen enough yourself to make you guess that.'

'I see that Mrs Weir is afraid of Mrs Temple,' I said, 'and I don't like her being moved into that small room, and not having everything comfortable about her.'

'Oh! that's sacrifice, discipline,' exclaimed Cotton; 'I know the words by heart, for I've heard nothing else since we came to Stonecliff. If it's possible, Miss Grant, for a woman to make her way to heaven by proxy, depend upon it that woman's Mrs Temple. Why, there isn't a duty that she has to perform which she doesn't make some one or another do for her. Miss Milicent—she sees the poor for her, and goes to the school; and Mr Temple, he pays her visits, and writes her letters; and Mrs Weir finds money for charity, and does poor-work, and gives up all her little comforts to make things pleasant to the visitors, and Mrs Temple counts up all that is done, and takes the sum total to herself.'

'I can't bear to hear you talk so, Cotton,' I said. 'I don't believe it can be true.'

'Just come here for a month, and see if it isn't,' exclaimed Cotton. 'A month! why, you'd find it out in a week! I have gone in and out of the room whilst visitors have been there, and have heard her go on—'We do this, and we do that'—till you wouldn't believe it, but I have been almost taken in myself; and no wonder my poor mistress is.'

'Then it was not Mrs Weir's wish to change her room?' I asked.

'No more than it is to cut her head off. It was all done by Mrs Temple's preaching about sacrifice and discipline. Mrs Temple has the command of the whole house, and goes where she likes, and does what she likes; and because she is in the drawing-room all day, and does not want a sitting-room to herself, she made my poor mistress fancy that it was too great a luxury for her to have the comfortable south room, which she chose when she came here; and so, after Miss Milicent was gone, and when there was actually an additional spare bedroom, she teased her into moving into that little poky dressing-room.'

'Miss Milicent ought not to have gone,' I could not help saying.

'She wasn't much good when she was here,' continued Cotton; 'she never saw anything that went on.'

Cotton was mistaken there. Miss Milicent, I was sure, saw a great deal, only with her awkwardness she did not know how to

remedy it. I felt really afraid for Mrs Weir, especially as Cotton continued her tissue of complaints, which might indeed be exaggerated, but for which I could scarcely doubt there was a foundation of truth. She had her own special grievance, which was natural enough; it was one which the servants could not help feeling—Mrs Temple's stinginess. I was aware of the characteristic, but I confess I was not prepared for all the little ways in which Cotton declared it was shown. The Dene house-keeping had been lavish, wrongly, so very often, and no doubt there was much which required correction; but I could feel keenly with Cotton when she described how even the char-woman's wages were cut down, and all kinds of make-shifts forced upon the kitchen in order to make a show in the parlour.

What I heard was very painful to me, and as for remedying any part of the evil, I saw no way to it. For unless Mr and Mrs Richardson were freely admitted to the house, there were none of Mrs Weir's friends near to be aware how things went on, or to take her part.

'Mrs Temple is very jealous of you, Miss Grant,' said Cotton, as the conversation ended, 'and I don't know whether it isn't as much as my place is worth to have let you in now. But I felt I must get hold of you, and if you can come over again before long, I'll try and smuggle you in; and if I can't, perhaps you won't mind the trouble of the walk for nothing, for I assure you it's charity.'

Cotton did not feel the difficulty which was present to me. Mrs Temple was the mistress of the house. If she did not like me to go there openly, I could not be smuggled in by the lady's maid—that would be entirely against all my principles, and I felt it would do no good in the end. If I was ever to be allowed to be any comfort to Mrs Weir, there must be no flaw in my conduct for Mrs Temple to seize upon. No, I must let it all rest in God's hands, knowing that, when the time came for me to be of use, He would open the door for me.

CHAPTER XLV.

MISS MILICENT crossed over to France safely, we heard that from John Hervey, and she was going on to Paris, hoping to find Mr Weir there, and to be with him in his lodging, and learn his plans, and help him with her advice. It sounded, just at first, very dutiful and self-denying, and I believe Miss Milicent herself thought it so ; but I hope it was not very wicked in me, I could not help remembering that she would find more amusement in Paris than at Stonecliff, and that if her father claimed her on the one side, her mother had an equal claim on the other. I was glad, however, to hear that so far her journey had prospered, and I tried not to be uneasy about what might come afterwards. Some persons might have wondered why I should have cared enough for her to feel anything like uneasiness ; but it must be remembered that my circle of interests was small, and that it was in my nature to throw myself very much into other people's concerns. An orphan as I was, and having no sister, I suppose I kept my heart more open than I might otherwise have done, for what befell my friends, especially those connected with my childhood. Many a heartache have I had for Mrs Weir, which I dared not speak of to any one, not even to kind Mrs Kemp, knowing she would not understand it.

Roger's stay was uncertain. It depended upon some business connected with Mr Pierce's affairs ; but he had made up his mind that it should not be more than three months ; and I knew he would keep to this determination if possible. We seldom spoke of the coming final separation. Sometimes I faced it. Sometimes I buoyed myself up with the hope that even yet events might occur to prevent it. I would not let myself be miserable. I only felt that I might be so. And we had soon one engrossing thought at Sandcombe. Mrs Morris was sinking rapidly. I was with Jessie as much as possible, and William and Roger were both as kind and considerate as could be desired, willing to spare me at all hours, and to put up with any inconvenience, so that the poor child should not be left. It was a trial to William especially to be without me, for, since his eyes had been so bad, he had depended upon me a good deal. I kept all his accounts and read the paper to him in the evening. Roger did this when I was away, besides look-

ing after the farm. William said to me, more than once, that Roger was his right hand, and it would be a bad day when we had to part with him again.

I was with Jessie the night that Mrs Morris died. The old lady sank quietly, and there was much to comfort us in the circumstances of her death ; but Jessie was heart-broken. As I followed her into her room, when all was over, helping her to undress and go to bed, she clung to me hysterically, exclaiming, 'Keep me with you, Ursie. I have not a relation nor a home.' And she said what I knew to be, in a great measure, true.

We took her back with us to Sandcombe on the day of the funeral. It was the only place she could go to. She shared my room ; for I did not like her to be alone. Her grief was very touching. I had never seen anything so real and deep ; and it brought out all the better parts of her nature. She was earnest, humble, affectionate, and singularly gracious in her thankfulness for everything which was done for her. I was almost sorry to see how she clung to us, knowing, as I did, that there might be a hard lot in store for her—a life amongst strangers.

I knew nothing for certain of the condition in which Mrs Morris had left her affairs ; but I had a suspicion, from something which passed between Roger and William on the day of the funeral, that it was not what had been expected. If this were so, and if Jessie had to make her own way in the world, it would be cruel to delude her by keeping the truth from her. I asked Roger ; but he gave me an unusually short answer, and even implied that it was not quite kind to enter upon the subject then. I inquired of William, but he informed me the accounts were not made up ; he could tell nothing till they were. This was a week after the funeral.

Jessie came down-stairs and sat with us, for the first time, that evening. Before, she had really been too unwell to leave her room ; and I had spent a good deal of my spare time with her. But this was dull for William and Roger, and not good for her : so I persuaded her at last to make an effort to join us. She certainly did look uncommonly pretty. Her black dress set off her clear complexion ; and she had taken pains with her hair, and made it look particularly nice ; and, without meaning to be affected, for I am sure she was not that in the least, there was a little shyness in her manner to William and Roger, caused, I sup-

pose, by the strangeness of her feelings, which, with her grief, gave her the quietness and softness which she sometimes wanted when in high spirits and good health. I asked her to come and sit by me at the tea-table, and, wishing to give her something to do, begged her to put the sugar into the cups, whilst I went out into the kitchen to give an order. When I came back I found that Roger was doing it for her, and that she was sitting in the window-seat, away from the fire, crying. It vexed me a little, that she should give way so soon; and, being afraid of showing any particular sympathy for fear of making her worse, I merely said, 'Come, Jessie dear, tea is ready. Here is a place for you by me.'

'It will be cold there, by the door,' said Roger; 'this is your place, Jessie;' and not seeing that it was inconvenient to me, as it crowded me, he placed a chair for her with her back to the fire.

Her being there just moved William out of the seat which he always preferred, and I did not like him to be turned out of it, now that his eyes were bad; and I knew he felt the cold. I was sure Jessie would not care, and I said, 'We will have the door shut; but if Jessie does not mind, that is William's place.' Jessie was going round to the other side directly, but Roger came up to the table, and pushed the tea-tray aside. 'Now, there is room for both,' he said; and as Jessie looked at me rather apologising for having disturbed me, he added, 'Oh! Ursie does not mind; she can make tea just as well at one side of the table as the other.'

It would have been foolish to mind such a trifle, but I could not help thinking to myself, what would poor Jessie do if she had to go into the rough world after being so petted as not to be allowed to sit away from the fire. We were rather constrained all tea-time; Jessie scarcely ate anything; and by some unfortunate stupidity we were constantly bringing up subjects which were, in a measure, painful to her.

Yet I thought myself careful. Miss Milicent's journey seemed tolerably safe, and I mentioned it; but then something was said about Lieutenant Macdonald, and I saw Jessie blush and look conscious, and William, with very bad tact, and forgetting my warning, was, as usual, going to joke her about him. Only a very few words were said, scarcely enough for Roger to notice; and I was not sure, indeed, whether he heard them, for he was just then lifting the tea-kettle from the hearth. He saw, how-

ever, that Jessie was discomposed, and made an effort to put things comfortable again; in fact, both he and William treated her like a petted child, and I could not blame them for it, though I felt in my own mind that it was bad for her.

There were several things to attend to after tea, and I succeeded in making Jessie help me a little, and then I gave her some needlework, and persuaded her to go to bed early, as she had slept badly the previous night. I am sure I felt as kindly towards her as possible, and wished to do everything I could to make her happy again, but, knowing her disposition, I felt that the less fuss made about her the better. And this manner of treating her, it seemed, did not quite please either of my brothers. As soon as she was gone up-stairs they began.

'Ursie,' said William, 'I think you are rather hard upon poor Jessie. You set her to work as though she was your servant.'

'I only wanted to employ her,' I replied. 'It was better for her than sitting still and thinking.'

'When people are in trouble they can't always make up their minds to work,' said Roger; and he threw down the newspaper, as though he had a good deal to say upon the subject.

'Jessie certainly is in a good deal of trouble,' I said; 'no one feels it more than myself; and I would do my very utmost to be kind to her; but I don't think you can know quite so well as I do what is best for a young girl. I am sure she feels obliged to me for giving her something to distract her thoughts.'

'You put her on a footing with Martha,' said Roger. 'She might not thank you so much for that.'

'O Roger!' I exclaimed, and I felt the colour rush to my cheeks; 'you don't mean that Jessie could have an unkind thought of me for that. Why, I help Martha myself every evening. There is not a thing I asked Jessie to do which I would not have done willingly.'

'Only, my little Trot has not known what sorrow and changed fortunes make others feel,' said Roger, kindly; and he came round to me, and leaning over my chair, kissed me.

I turned my face up at him, and endeavoured to smile; but my spirit was roused, and I said, 'Perhaps neither you nor I know that, for we have both been tolerably prosperous. But, Roger, if Jessie's fortunes are changed, there is all the more reason why she shouldn't be spoiled.'

'You women are always hard upon one another,' exclaimed William.

Tears of vexation filled my eyes. There was nothing I disliked more than that kind of hard nature which tries to subdue sorrow by not allowing that it exists; and I had been waiting upon Jessie all day nearly, in one way and another, doing little kindnesses, and putting myself out of my way in a manner my brothers had no notion of; and the very reason why I asked her to help me that evening was that she might feel herself at home. But if they had an impression I was hard, it was no use to argue about it, so I made rather a light answer, and said, 'We will ask Jessie this day six months which she thinks her best friend.'

'She is not likely to be here then,' said William. He spoke somewhat shyly, as though approaching a disagreeable subject.

'Have you had a letter from the lawyer?' exclaimed Roger, turning round shortly.

'A long rigmarole,' said William, drawing a paper out of his pocket; 'but the upshot of it is that, when all the debts are paid, there will be little enough of a legacy left.'

This was the first approach to a statement of Jessie's position which I had heard, and I begged William to explain it more clearly.

'Has Mrs Morris died so very poor?' I inquired.

'Not so very poor,' answered William shortly; 'but Jessie is not her daughter.'

How stupid I had been, not to see at once how matters stood! Of course, whatever there might be which was not left to Charles Morris would most probably belong to William himself, in right of his wife.

'Then Jessie has nothing,' I observed; and I suppose my tone showed my disappointment, for William answered directly—

'You must remember, Ursie, that Jessie has no real claim upon any one, and that Mrs Morris did for her more than could have been expected in bringing her up. She has left her a legacy of a couple of hundred pounds, and with her pretty face she'll soon make her way in the world.'

'But has she two hundred pounds?' said Roger, who had returned to his newspaper.

'The debts may not be so much as we think,' answered William.

Roger stood up, turned his back upon William, and faced the fire. A few minutes afterwards he left the room.

Neither William nor I spoke. William sat broodingly by the hearth, and I worked very fast. Presently, when I saw William's head fall back, as though he was asleep, I went out to find Roger. He was in the large parlour, sitting there alone in the dark. I only discovered him by hearing him cough. He laughed when I came in with the candle in my hand, and said the little parlour was so hot.

'Not so hot with the fire as with the conversation,' I replied. 'What is the matter, old man?' and I rested my hand upon his head, and smoothed his hair.

'William does not mean to do anything but what is just,' he exclaimed; 'but, Trot, Jessie Lee is an orphan.'

'Yes,' I said; 'and we are the nearest friends, not to call us relations, she has, except Charles Morris. I don't forget it, Roger, though I did ask her to help Martha this evening.'

'And two hundred pounds is little enough for her,' he continued.

'It won't keep her from working for her bread; but she will be none the worse off for that,' I replied.

'Only it ought to be two hundred pounds,' he continued; 'and William says it won't be near that when the debts are paid.'

'I don't understand,' was my remark.

'Mrs Morris drew up her will herself,' he said; 'so it is oddly enough put together. She has left two thousand pounds to William, as you know.'

'I was not told the sum exactly,' I replied; 'but I knew there was something considerable.'

'Well! there are some debts to be paid,' continued Roger. 'Mrs Morris evidently did not know how they would mount up, so she has ordered that they should be settled from the same fund out of which Jessie is to have her money. There is no doubt that she meant the legacy to come first; but she has worded it so as to allow of the debts having the first claim. In that case Jessie will lose half her legacy.'

'But William and Charles Morris will surely undertake to pay the debts, if there is not enough in any other way?' I said.

'Charles Morris says no,' replied Roger; 'and William is all for law and justice; and he has had a lawyer's opinion, and the debts are to come first and the legacy second.'

'It can't be!' I exclaimed. 'It is cruelty: actually taking the orphan's money! And William so well to do in the world,

and having no children,—not even like Charles Morris in that respect !’

‘It is law,’ was all Roger’s answer.

It came to my lips to say, ‘That is harder dealing than asking Jessie to help Martha ;’ but it would have been mean to taunt him, and besides, I was myself sorely troubled.

‘We musn’t allow it,’ I said, after a little thought. ‘Roger, I have money of my own. I would rather part with every penny of it than that Jessie Lee should have less than was intended for her.’

‘My own honest, little Trot ! Yes, I know you would. But it won’t come to that ; there are other ways and means.’

‘Not breaking in upon your money !’ I exclaimed. ‘You told me the other day of what consequence it was to you just now to have every penny you could lay your hands on.’

‘There is a greater consequence than that, Ursie,—to do justly in God’s sight. But I have not made up my mind. I don’t know what I shall do. Be off now ! I shall go and smoke my pipe. It will all be right.’

CHAPTER XLVI.

I HAD not seen Mrs Kemp for weeks, and I thought it would do Jessie good to go out a little ; so the next day being very fine, I had the chaise ordered, that I might drive her over myself to Longside. I wanted, too, to make Mrs Kemp better acquainted with her ; for I knew she was prejudiced against her, and really Jessie seemed now so much improved, that I felt this to be in a certain degree unfair. Roger came to the door to see us off ; he was just the same as usual,—not at all put out, apparently, by what had passed the previous evening ; but he said he must go over to Mr Stewart at Hatton, and have a little talk with him about Canada business. It would not do to be dawdling on in England much longer. That was not a very enlivening speech to hear, just as I was setting out with Jessie ; and she herself seemed hurt by it, and, when he was gone, turned to me, and observed, she did not know what Sandcombe would be like without him. It would be to her just like

losing a brother. The remark seemed to open the door to a very important subject. From many little observations which had dropped from Jessie, I gathered that she looked to Sandcombe as her home. It was not unnatural that she should do so. Partly from her disposition, and partly from the way in which she had been treated, she really was a mere child still, leaning upon every one, and always thinking that she should be provided for without thought of her own. And at first I should have said that Sandcombe would be the best place for her, at least for the present ; but that was under the idea that Mrs Morris had left her enough to live upon. Now, with only two hundred pounds in the world, and perhaps not that, it was, I feared, necessary that she should look out for some situation in which she could work for herself. William, indeed, might make a compromise with his conscience, and think that he atoned for what was almost like taking possession of Jessie's little fortune, by giving her a home for some months ; but I felt that the plan would be very objectionable, even if it were proposed for a permanence. Sandcombe could only be Jessie's home under certain circumstances. If I were to go away she must go too ; and if William were to die, we must both go. It would be nothing like a reparation, however good-natured it might appear. A wound made by injustice cannot be healed by kindness ; and I grew indignant as I thought that William could be fidgety about Jessie's exerting herself in a way which could not possibly be painful beyond the moment, whilst he was deliberately making up his mind to deprive her of at least half of the little she might call her own.

Jessie herself had no thoughts of the kind. She liked going for a drive ; she liked anything, indeed, which made her feel like a lady having nothing to do but to enjoy herself. She was anxious that we should go over the down and through Dene in order to reach Longside ; but I strongly objected to it. Not liking, however, to thwart her unnecessarily, I merely said that if we went round by Hatton we should have a longer drive ; and this seemed to satisfy her, and she wrapped her cloak round her, and arranged her crape veil very becomingly, and leaned back at her ease in the pony-chaise, as pretty a picture of a young girl as could be desired. It was very painful to have to break in upon the dream in which I felt she was indulging, and my heart beat fast as I said, whilst we were driving through the outskirts of Hatton, 'Everything must seem sadly changed to

you, Jessie dear ; but you will become more reconciled by and by.'

'I shall try to be,' she said, 'and I ought to be when every one is so kind to me. But I shall miss Mr Roger terribly.'

'We shall all miss him,' I replied ; 'unless, indeed, it were possible for me to go back with him.'

'To Canada? O Ursie!—but what would Mr Grant do without you?'

'I can't say ; it is difficult sometimes to know where one's duty lies. If I were to go, Jessie, I should think a great deal about you, and long to hear how you were getting on. I suppose there are not any of Mr Morris's friends who would take care of you for a time, until something turns up which might suit you?'

The poor child sat quite silent. I believe she did not thoroughly understand my meaning, though my words sounded sad to her. I drove on slowly, till I saw her take out her handkerchief and wipe her eyes, and pull down the veil over her face, and then I said : 'God will help you through it, dear Jessie, if you will only look to Him.'

I had only just said the words when I heard the tramp of horses coming behind the chaise, and drew to one side to let them pass. 'You have not driven very fast,' called out Roger's cheerful voice. He was on his way to Mr Stewart's, and John Hervey was with him. Jessie kept her face averted, and I saw Roger look at her intently. I am sure he quite well knew she was crying. John Hervey came round to me at the other side, and spoke in rather a low voice, 'They have heard again from Miss Milicent, Ursie.'

'So far so good,' I said.

'Yes, if she can stay with him ; but it seems an odd kind of place he is in—somewhere in the heart of Paris. She writes in good spirits enough, but I am afraid she is going to be taken in.'

'It will be her own doing,' I said. 'What have you heard of Mrs Weir lately?'

'Nothing, except that Mrs Temple is on the look-out for some one who will neither eat, drink, nor sleep—but read to Mrs Weir all day, and sit up with her all night, for fifteen pounds a year. Now, Roger, we shall be late ; good-bye ;' and they both rode off.

I don't know what had passed between Jessie and Roger ; but I saw that Jessie had put up her veil, and it was not drawn down again till we arrived at Longside.

Mrs Kemp was in the front of the house, feeding some tame partridges, which the farmer had taken a fancy to have, and they, and a number of young chickens and ducks, were gathered about her, making her so busy that she did not perceive when we came into the garden. Her welcome to Jessie was as hearty as I could expect—though I could see in her manner just the suspicion which was all the unkindness she ever indulged in. Mary, she said, was full of work, for it was baking day—but she would find time to have a little gossip with me; and, begging Jessie to wait in the parlour for a few minutes, she took me with her to find Mary. We were no sooner, however, out of the room than I begged her to stay and have a little chat with me first; not that I did not wish to see Mary, but I had a good many little things to talk over with her.

‘I don’t know where to take you, my dear,’ she said, considering a moment: ‘my room has been scoured this morning, and the floor is damp; you’ll take cold if you go there. But here’s the farmer’s smoking-room, do you mind going in?’ The smoking-room was very small, and near the kitchen. I believe the farmer did smoke a pipe there occasionally, when there were persons in the house who disliked the smell of tobacco, but it was used for a lumber-room besides.

‘Now, sit down, my dear, and say your say;’ and Mrs Kemp placed a chair for me, and sat down herself in the window seat. ‘We shan’t be interrupted, and no one will guess where we are.’

‘But I must not leave Jessie too long,’ I said.

Mrs Kemp looked up with some surprise. ‘Are you so very particular?’

‘Not always; only just now, when she is in trouble.’

‘Well! yes, all right. But, my dear, what is she going to do with herself?’

‘That is the question;—I don’t know. William may ask her to stay with us.’ Mrs Kemp looked very grave. ‘You don’t approve,’ I said, and then, after a moment, added, ‘no more do I.’

Her face brightened up. ‘I was afraid, my dear, you were going to burthen yourself with her.’

‘You don’t like her,’ I exclaimed, and I almost regretted that Jessie’s name had been mentioned.

‘No, I don’t like her, my dear. I had rather say that out at once, and then there’s not likely to be so much prejudice in it,

We are too near the Prices to like her ; and it does not please me, Ursie, that you should have so much to do with her.'

'I think—I am sure, indeed—that you believe her to be much more mixed with the Prices than she really is,' I began.

'Very likely, my dear ; but, as the farmer says, "a man is known by his friends," and I suppose it's the same case with a woman ; and Mrs Price's ways are just those which a modest, well-behaved girl would turn from. To see her drive by with her smart cloak and fly-away bonnet, and two or three idle men following, just as we are going off to church on a Sunday, is quite sufficient for me. Jessie Lee may be an angel by nature, yet when she goes to stay at Dene—I don't want to say anything unkind—but it seems to me that she puts herself in the way of being a fallen one.'

I don't know when I had seen Mrs Kemp so excited, and her old-fashioned notions of propriety were quite scandalised by the new customs of Dene. There was an exaggeration in her feeling against Jessie, but I had no time to spend in arguing her out of it, so I merely said : 'Whatever Mrs Price may be, it is quite clear that it is our business now to take charge of Jessie, and keep her out of harm's way.'

'Yes, if you can ; and for that end, my dear, you had better keep her out of Lieutenant Macdonald's way.'

'There is no fear there,' I said. 'She has refused him.'

'Refused him ! has she ? Well, that 's more than I gave her credit for. Every one about here said that she had been warned about him, but that she was determined to have him.'

'So you see she is good for something,' I continued.

'Yes ; something.'

'A good deal, if she only had some one to advise and to love her.'

'And is that to be you, my dear ?' asked Mrs Kemp, simply.

'No, I wish it could be ; but I don't think it is possible ;' and in a few words I put before Mrs Kemp what was Jessie's position ; not, of course, mentioning anything about William and the legacy, but merely saying that the sum left her by Mrs Morris was very small, and there might be claims upon it, and that at any rate it would not support her by itself, though it might keep her in clothes if she lived with us.

'Just as the farmer thought,' she exclaimed ; 'just what he said to me only last night. "I am afraid," said he, "that Jessie Lee is tied on to Ursie for life."'

But I interrupted her. 'Dear Mrs Kemp,' I said, 'indeed the farmer is mistaken; it is what I feel must not be; but how to prevent it is the difficulty. I don't think men like to do disagreeable things, and William won't put before her that she can't stay with us, though he will be sure to complain if she does; and how I am to do it I don't know.'

Mrs Kemp pondered a little. 'You must find something else for her to do, my dear,' she said.

'But I can't look about, and inquire behind her back, as it were. She would think it so very unkind, if it came to her ears.'

'That is true. Nothing is ever gained in this world by not being straightforward.'

'And then it comes into my mind sometimes whether it is necessary after all; whether she is not very much in the same case that I was when I first came to Sandcombe.'

'Only, Ursie, you always knew what you had to look to, and were set upon working for yourself,' she replied.

'Yes, and Leah wanted me, and I can manage very well without Jessie. The only thing is, she is so little able to go alone.'

'She has two legs of her own,' said Mrs Kemp.

I smiled as I answered, 'Yes, but very weak ones.'

'I doubt if you will help her, my dear, by adding a wooden one of yours,' replied Mrs Kemp.

'It may be better to go halting,' I said, 'than to tumble down.'

'I never heard of any human creature yet that was able even to halt with three legs,' replied Mrs Kemp, laughing. 'If you want to make Jessie Lee strong, my dear, it strikes me you must put her in a position in which she will feel that she has no legs but her own to depend upon, and then she will learn how to use them.'

'And if she should never learn, and get into mischief,' I said anxiously.

'You can't think, surely, that you will be responsible,' replied Mrs Kemp. 'We are bound to help others to walk in the right way, and God knows how much we may have to answer for in not doing it; but I don't see that we are bound to break our backs by carrying them, for fear they should wander into the wrong; and I suppose, Ursie, that if we do, the chances are that we shall all fall to the ground together.'

'I was afraid,' I said, 'that I might be deciding hardly, and

I wanted another opinion. I believe I wish her to be independent, and so I am the more afraid of my own reasons.'

'As the farmer says: two and two make four, whether we wish it or not,' replied Mrs Kemp, 'and we need not be afraid to own it. In Leah's day, Ursie, things would have been different, no doubt. She was a married woman, and had a home of her own, and Jessie was all but brought up by her, and it would have been her duty, no doubt, to find a place for her cousin by her own fireside, especially as she had no children. But you are not Leah, my dear, and you have no house of your own yet, though I hope some day you will have,—and moreover, you are but a young girl, having enough to do to look after yourself. Don't you see that to take upon yourself to be answerable for Jessie is putting upon your conscience what God never intended should be there. I should say, try and find out something which may be good for her to do, and in the meantime keep her at Sandcombe, and teach her all the sensible things you can. I can't but think you will do more for her by far in that way than by tying her on to your apron strings, and fancying she is going right because she has not the opportunity of doing anything else.'

'I tried to open the subject this morning,' I said, 'but it was difficult.'

'I wish you could put something before her which she might like to undertake,' said Mrs Kemp. 'The farmer sometimes tells me that the quickest way of pulling down old notions is by building up new ones. It is the plan he has gone upon in bringing folks to his way of thinking, about improving the cottages. He might have talked to them for the hour, and he would not have persuaded them; but when they saw what he was doing himself, they came round quite naturally. And so, Ursie, my dear, it may be the same with Jessie, if you want her to put aside the notions she has been accustomed to of late, and take to others.'

A sudden thought struck me. 'I did hear of something,' I said, 'as I was coming here, but it would not do; no, it could not.'

'Think again, my dear. My mother used to declare that there was a "lion in her path," whenever a new notion was proposed to her. Perhaps there is one in yours.'

'Mrs Temple is the lion,' I said, laughing. 'If it were not for her the plan might do. She wants some one to look after Mrs Weir, and read to her, and nurse her. Jessie might suit

well enough for that, for she has very gentle ways, and I think Mrs Weir would be fond of her ; but then I know that a good deal would be put upon her. I dare say, in fact, she would be made to do a great deal of work besides ; I should scarcely like to propose it.'

'No ; and yet it would be close at hand, and you could have your eye upon her. It would be worth inquiring about ; there might be worse plans.'

That was very true, but I did not take at all kindly to the suggestion. Mrs Kemp urged me a little more. She thought I still had a lurking wish to keep Jessie at Sandcombe ; but she was quite mistaken there. I was only glad to have another opinion to support that which I had formed myself. We had been talking longer than I had intended, and I was afraid I should have but little time left for Mary ; so I proposed to go to her, and Mrs Kemp agreed, adding, 'It seems to me, Ursie, that you may just as well make use of this notion about Stonecliff to sound Jessie, and see what she thinks of doing, even if it should come to nothing.'

The idea was a good one, and yet I was so perverse that it made me feel almost cross. The fact was, I believe, that I did not like the thought of Jessie's filling the place which had once been partly marked out for myself. I would not have gone to Stonecliff on any account, even for the prospects of waiting upon Mrs Weir ; but it did not please me that Jessie should go. I could better have borne to see a stranger there. Persons are very fortunate whose tempers are not perverse,—mine always was so. As in looking through a telescope, I generally had to make two or three twists with my mind before I could see things rightly.

CHAPTER XLVII.

EVENTS followed each other quickly about that time. It was not more than ten days after the drive to Longside, that William was off to London to consult an oculist. Farmer Kemp and Roger were frightened about him, and they frightened me too ; and between us we persuaded him, though not without much difficulty, to go. What chiefly alarmed us was the fact, that my father's sight had been very bad before his death ; and

it was said that if he had lived he would almost certainly have been blind. Something of the same tendency, we feared, might be inherited by William. A cold would scarcely have produced such consequences, if there was not some predisposition beforehand; and William was so extremely careless about himself, that we had no hope of his adopting even ordinary remedies, unless he was put under strict discipline. He was extremely unhappy, and, beyond measure, fidgety, when he was ill; but for all that, he would never do what he was told in order to get better.

As it happened, he could not have gone at a better time, since Roger was at hand to attend to things in his absence; and we were satisfied as to his comfort when away, for he was to be at a house belonging to Mrs Mason, formerly of Dene. She had, within the last year, given up being housekeeper, and taken to let lodgings. I knew she would look after him; but I made him promise that if any operation was to be performed, or if he should be at all ill, I was to be sent for immediately. Oh, that promise; though I urged it earnestly, it fell upon my heart like lead, for I knew that God was binding me to William by ties of duty and kindness which it would be sin to break.

The effect of William's departure was to bring me to a positive decision in my own mind as to Jessie. If I should be called to London, she could not stay at Sandcombe. This seemed the simplest and easiest way of putting the case before her; and I was most thankful for it; for up to this time we had been so occupied with William, and so anxious about him, and indeed Jessie had made herself so useful in reading to him and writing for him, that I do not know what I should have done without her. I had heard, again, of Mrs Temple's plan of a kind of companion for Mrs Weir, from Mrs Richardson, who kindly came over to see us when she knew of William's trouble, and I found, as I had expected, that the new person was to take the place of Cotton, and only to have a girl besides to help her. I could not help fearing that Cotton might have got into disgrace by admitting me to Stonecliff, or perhaps by some incautious complaints; but it was useless to vex myself about it, for I was quite tied to Sandcombe, and could not possibly have found time to walk over and inquire about it. I felt for poor Mrs Weir very much, as I knew that Cotton would prove a loss that it would be almost impossible to replace.

The day that Mrs Richardson called, which was two days

before William went, I mentioned Jessie to her, and asked if she thought it likely she would do for the situation. Her youth seemed the great objection, but it was not a very serious one, as there were elderly servants in the house, and Mrs Richardson seemed glad of the idea ; but I begged her not to say anything about it, for I felt in my own mind that I had a hard task before me in bringing Jessie even to think of it.

My hope was that I should have Roger to support me. His common sense, I thought, would make him see the necessity of the case directly, and I introduced the subject the very day William left us. It was after dinner, and Jessie was gone out of the room, and I knew she was likely to be busy for half an hour or more, so I began : ' Jessie looks much better ; don't you think so ? '

' Yes ; quite a different person. It is your company which has done her good, Trot.'

' Time and occupation, rather,' I said. ' She has not much of my company ; and if I am called to London, she will have less of it ; we must make haste and find something to suit her before that.'

I saw that the notion had struck Roger for the first time.

' I thought she was going to live here,' he said, quickly.

' No ; who dreamed of such a thing ? ' I exclaimed. ' Not William, I am sure.'

' He never said anything to the contrary.'

' Because it is not his way to take business upon himself which does not belong to him. He knew that I should be on the look-out for something for Jessie.'

' And have you found anything ? ' inquired Roger.

' I have heard of something,' I said. ' Mrs Weir wants a person to read to her, and look after her, half a companion and half a lady's-maid. What do you say ? Will it do ? '

' I am no judge,' he replied, and he took up his hat, which was on the table, and left the room.

That evening, before we separated, and as Jessie was busying herself in putting away some of the supper-things, Roger said, ' Jessie, has Ursie been talking to you at all about her plans for you ? '

I can't say how surprised I felt at his beginning in this sudden way. I answered for her quickly : ' There is no hurry ; we need not talk about it to-night.'

Jessie looked from one to the other.

'It will be no such great evil, I trust,' continued Roger; and he made a movement, as though he would have gone up to her, but he stopped: 'If Ursie is obliged to go to London'—

'I can go to Mrs Price,' exclaimed Jessie, whilst her eyes sparkled with pleasure. 'She said she would be delighted to have me.'

I glanced at Roger,—he looked pained, not angry,—and did not answer.

'I am afraid that won't do, dear Jessie,' I said, as kindly as I possibly could, whilst feeling more cross with her than I should like to acknowledge. 'What you will want will be some place where you can make a little something for yourself; and fond as Mrs Price may be of you, I suppose she is not likely to pay you for staying with her.' The colour mounted to Jessie's cheeks: 'You mean I have to provide for myself,' she said, proudly.

'Every one is better for being independent, dear Jessie,' I said, 'and you know you have been accustomed to work all your life.'

'Amongst my friends,' she replied. 'It is a very different thing going amongst strangers.' She looked towards Roger, as though craving his support. He was leaning over a chair, moving it backwards and forwards, but his countenance was imperturbable.

There was a momentary pause, and Jessie sat down, and the tears came fast; I saw him start then, but he controlled himself, and left it to me to soothe her. I put before her everything which I thought could calm or elevate her mind. I told her that I could understand all her feelings; that I did not know how soon I might not be obliged to do the same myself, and I urged her to be brave, and face the trial with a trusting heart, knowing that God who had sent it, would enable her to bear it. But the only answer I obtained was, 'It is not the same, Ursie. You have a home and relations; I am an orphan, and have no home.'

I had nothing to reply, and my heart reproached me for cruelty. Roger came to my assistance. 'Jessie,' he said, 'it is quite true that you are an orphan, and have no home, but God has given you true friends, who won't forsake you. Whilst William, and Ursie, and I live, wherever we may be, you may always count upon us, and you won't vex us now, I am sure, by putting yourself against what comes in the way of God's ordering.'

Still the tears fell, and at last Roger pushed aside the chair, and going up to her, took one of her hands in both his, and said, 'You can't think we don't care for you, Jessie.'

The tone of his voice must have touched her, for she gave him one of her sweetest smiles; he still kept hold of her hand, till something seemed to strike him, and he let it drop suddenly, and turning to me, said, 'Tell her what you have heard of.'

'Not now,' I replied, 'not till she wants to know; we need not press it upon her.'

But Jessie looked up at me, and said: 'Yes, now, I may as well know the worst.'

'It might not be so very disagreeable,' I said, 'if you were to be companion to Mrs Weir, and read to her, and look after her while Miss Milicent is away. You would be sure to love her.' Even in the midst of my worry, I could have smiled at the change in Jessie's face. It brightened in a way that was quite marvellous, as with all the eagerness of a child, she exclaimed: 'Read to Mrs Weir! well! I should like that. I thought I was to scrub floors! Is it settled?'

'Only talked about,' I replied. 'We wanted your consent first: but you will find some disagreeables, Jessie; you must think well about it.'

'Thought won't make much difference, where there is such a brave spirit,' said Roger. 'Jessie is fit to face the world, I see.'

'She is fit for bed now,' I observed; 'you look quite tired, dear Jessie. Just take your candle and go, and we will say all there is to say to-morrow, only think by yourself whether you could bear the kind of life.' Roger lighted her candle, yet she lingered, asking me questions, some of which I answered, but she teased me with others, though very good-humouredly. It must have been nearly ten minutes before I could persuade her that I was in earnest, and did not mean to stay and talk any more to her. It would have been useless to do so, she was in such a childish mood, the question of chief importance being whether Mrs Weir liked story-books.

'There are not many girls of her age who would bear a reverse of fortune like that,' said Roger, when Jessie left the room. It would have seemed unkind in me to differ, so I said nothing.

Roger took up the plan for Jessie's going to Mrs Weir with his usual quiet energy and good sense. He made me talk it over again with Mrs Kemp, and suggested what I doubt if I

should have thought of myself, that she should be the person to arrange the business with Mrs Temple, so that no jealousy might be excited, and that Mrs Kemp might, in a manner, be considered as Jessie's adviser and friend. He did an excellent deed in this. Both Mrs Kemp and the farmer had gained for themselves a character in the neighbourhood, which even Mrs Temple was obliged to acknowledge; and better terms were made for Jessie through their means than could ever have been obtained by me. So kind it was of Mrs Kemp to take up the matter as she did! but she was one of those who never let a prejudice stand in the way of a duty.

Jessie's money was still left unsettled. I asked Roger about it, but he could give me no definite answer, and merely said that before he left England he should certainly see that something satisfactory was arranged about it. I could not help thinking that his efforts towards placing Jessie at Stonecliff had something to do with his sense of justice, and that he felt himself all the more obliged to be her friend because William was inclined to deal hardly with her. Of William himself we had very indifferent accounts. The doctor was extremely doubtful whether anything could be done for his eyes. He was trying different lotions, but they had no effect,—rather indeed upon the whole his sight grew worse, and he was becoming impatient and fretful. Still he remained in London, but nothing was said about my going up to him. Tidings of Miss Milicent were equally unsatisfactory. Her letters, as far as I could gather from John Hervey, and I saw no one else who knew anything about them, were only mist and vapour, except as regarded the need of money. John knew that, because ever since the crash of Mr Weir's affairs, he had himself been employed to collect Mrs Weir's rents, and do little matters of business for her, which if they had been put into the hands of a lawyer would have run away with a good deal of money. As far, he told me, as he could gather from the few words which dropped occasionally from Mrs Temple when they met on business, Mr Weir was speculating again, and Miss Milicent was entering into his concerns and encouraging him. They had removed to better lodgings, and upon the whole Miss Milicent seemed to be rather enjoying herself than not, and there was no talk of her returning home.

Every one, I suppose, has had experience of that kind of transition, that expectant state, in which we were at this time living at Sandcombe; feeling that changes must come before

long, and finding ourselves, indeed, advancing surely towards them, yet so slowly that the progress from day to day was scarcely perceptible. Jessie's going to Stonecliff, indeed, broke in upon the routine of our lives; but even that came in a way which did not much disturb me. I had really nothing to do with it, for I had not ventured to go over to speak to Mrs Weir about her, lest I might do mischief. She walked over to Stonecliff one afternoon, and Roger and I with her. There were no solemn leave-takings, or fears, or warnings. Jessie took her new life as she might have done the idea of a visit to Dene; and there was something which roused all our kindlier feelings of interest in the simple way in which she trusted that every one would be kind to her, and that she should be very happy, and free, and allowed to come over and see us from Stonecliff just as she used to do from Hatton. I could not damp her by assuring her that it would not be so. If she made friends with Mrs Temple it might be so. All I could say was, that the only way to find pleasure in any life, is to set one's heart upon its duties, and so I begged her to turn her whole mind to the wish of making Mrs Weir comfortable.

I was sorry to part from her, and yet more happy than I can say, to be at last quite alone with Roger. When we said good-bye to Jessie on the top of the hill above Stonecliff, and I put my arm within his, and we walked together over the down, as in the old times, and I knew that we were probably to have that evening and many others to ourselves, without interruption, I felt a peace at my heart which seemed very near to what we hope to enjoy in heaven.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

I MAY pass over many weeks. It was summer, and Roger was with us still, detained partly by lawyer's business, partly on account of William's infirmity, which was become very serious. Sandcombe was cheerful with haymaking and the prospect of a good harvest, and I was busy working hard, but willingly myself, and leading others to do the same.

Since Jessie went away, Esther Smithson had been regularly

hired, and another school-girl was in training, so that there was no over-work. William would not yet give up looking after everything or pretending to do so; and he stood in the way of many of my little plans of improvement; yet I managed to carry out several, and I was hopeful about more. Now that Roger was at home, the men were regular at church; and any cases of bad conduct in the week were immediately noticed. The boys also were kept more apart from the men, and encouraged by a kind word from Roger to attend to good habits. We could not yet rival Longside in the respectability of our labourers, but we were advancing towards it. Roger still worked at William about the old question of the improvement of the cottages, and advanced so far as to obtain a promise that when his eyes were better he would see about them,—a very vague promise to me, and I suspect to Roger also. All that I could do in the meantime was to see some of the cottagers' wives myself, and try to put them in the way of managing better with the little space they had. They were inclined to think me very interfering at first, but Sandcombe was a place to which they looked for help when they were ill, or out of work, and so they did not like quite to neglect my instructions. Upon the whole, my life at that time was very bright, more so indeed inwardly than outwardly, for there was a hope dawning upon it which I could not willingly allow myself to perceive, because it came through another's trial.

With regard to Jessie, the accounts were as pleasant as we had any reason to expect. Mrs Weir liked her, and Mrs Temple put up with her. This was the best I had anticipated, but I don't think it satisfied Roger. What he may have pictured to himself for her, I don't know, but he thought the place a hard one; and I could not persuade him that any place would be hard to a poor child like Jessie, sent into the world for the first time to provide for herself. He worried himself about it so much at times, that I was quite glad he had not more opportunities of seeing her. The time when we generally had her with us was on a Sunday afternoon, about once in three weeks. Mrs Weir was very particular as to her going to church, and now and then she was allowed to walk home with us and drink tea; in fact, it was part of the agreement made for her by Mrs Kemp. These were the occasions when we had an outbreak of complaints.

'It won't do, Ursie,' said Roger, coming to me one Sunday,

just as I was getting tea ready, and when Jessie was gone upstairs. 'It's worse than the slaves.'

'What has Jessie been telling you now?' I asked; for they had been walking home part of the way together, whilst I stayed behind to say a few words to Mary Kemp. 'I don't wonder at her not being able to bear it,' he continued. 'English people were never made to put up with spics.'

I laughed a little—'Oh!' I said, 'I know what you are talking about;—Mrs Temple's way of finding out everything which goes on in the house. It is very odious, I confess; but Jessie is not likely to have much to betray; and so Mrs Temple will, one must hope, be tired of it before long.'

Just then Jessie came in. Roger placed a chair for her next me. 'I have been telling Ursie,' he said, 'what you were telling me just now. It is too bad.'

Jessie's colour rose. 'Oh, it is nothing,' she said, 'nothing to signify. Ursie won't think it of consequence.'

'Indeed I shall, Jessie,' I said, 'if there is anything unfair in it, or unlike what a lady should do.'

'One can't have one's things to one's self,' said Jessie; 'but I suppose a girl like me has no right to expect it.' The tears were in her eyes in an instant.

'Mrs Temple likes to know everything that goes on, I am aware,' I said.

'But she need not let her servants pry into letters, and ask impertinent questions,' said Roger.

'What is the grievance, Jessie?' I said; 'I don't quite understand.' Jessie, I saw, was unwilling to answer; she moved to let William pass,—for he was just come in to tea,—and made a little fuss with him, wishing, I could not help thinking, to change the subject.

I did not like to press her any farther, and some trifling remarks were made which led at last to an observation about Dene. Lieutenant Macdonald's name was accidentally mentioned, Jessie's cheeks were crimson instantly. Whether there was anything in it more than her trick of blushing and being conscious, I could not tell; but I disliked seeing it. By this time she ought at least to have been able to hear Mr Macdonald's name with indifference. I suppose I must have been led into a train of thought upon the subject, or in some way shown by my manner that I was not quite comfortable, for Roger called me aside after tea, and said: 'Ursie, you shouldn't

be hard upon little Jessie ; she wants some one to sympathise with her.'

I quite started. 'Sympathise !' I exclaimed. 'I do sympathise to the utmost. No one can know better than I do how hateful it is to live in the same house with Mrs Temple. But Jessie didn't tell me what the particulars of the present trouble were.'

'You didn't ask,' he said ; 'and she is so quick in her feelings, she will never come out to you if you don't encourage her.'

'Really, Roger,' I said, 'I can scarcely think Jessie requires encouragement to come out, as you call it, to me, when we have been together like relations from childhood.'

'Relations are just the very persons to whom it is often most difficult to talk,' he said, 'and, besides, Jessie looks up to you, and thinks, naturally enough, that you will expect of her the same kind of endurance which you can practise yourself.'

'I can't say much for my endurance,' I said, laughing. 'I know I used to go into my room, at the Heath, and bolt the door, and walk up and down, storming against Mrs Temple. There wasn't much endurance in that, I am afraid ; but it won't exactly do, Roger, to say this to Jessie. You know she has been a little spoiled, and always makes the most of her troubles. I don't mean, of course, that I won't try and give her all the sympathy that is reasonable.'

'The question is, what is reasonable ?' said Roger.

'Well ; tell me what the case is, and then perhaps I can judge.'

'I shall leave Jessie to explain for herself,' he replied. 'Stories always lose their point coming second-hand.'

He was a little odd in his manner ; and I am sure he knew it, for after he had left the room, he came back again and kissed me, and said, 'One can't expect all the world to be as wise as you, my little Trot.'

I went to Jessie directly, for I felt that perhaps I had been a little wanting in tenderness. She was in my room, crying, and that alone would have made me feel gently towards her, if I had been inclined to be otherwise, which I certainly was not. All I longed to know was that she was not in any way encouraging thoughts of Lieutenant Macdonald. I could not be gentle on that point, it would have been wrong.

In reply to my questions, however, I could gain only very unsatisfactory answers. The principal grievance resolved itself

into the fact that she had one day found the housemaid spying into her drawers, and that Mrs Temple had been told that she received a great many letters, which Jessie declared to be false. Since then, she said, she had never received a letter without the post-mark being examined, and hints given as to where it came from.

‘Very disagreeable, Jessie,’ I said, ‘but you can’t have correspondents enough to make it signify, and if you don’t show that you care, the servants will soon leave off troubling you. Nothing stops people’s teasing so soon as being indifferent to it.’

I don’t think Jessie was satisfied. Either she felt herself more of a martyr than she could bring me to acknowledge, or there was some deeper cause of annoyance than I knew of.

She seemed once as though she was upon the point of telling me something more, but hearing Roger call out to her to put on her things quickly or she would be late, she turned away, saying, ‘There is no time now, I will talk of it another day.’

I urged the present moment, but the wish, whatever it was, had left her. She went on talking upon other subjects all the time she was preparing to go, and I gained more insight into her present life in those few minutes than in the whole two hours before.

She was very fond of Mrs Weir—who, indeed, would not have been—and I hoped that the good lady’s earnestness was having some effect upon her. Jessie said she read the Bible to her every day, and some other books which Mrs Temple provided. Mrs Weir had asked once for a story-book which she had heard of, but it had never been forthcoming, and the history books which Mrs Temple recommended made Mrs Weir’s head ache, so there was not much variety in the reading; but Jessie had her time fully employed in other ways. She did all the needlework which Mrs Weir required, and some for Mrs Temple besides. That, she said, was the most disagreeable part of her business. Mrs Temple was so very particular, and did not care how many times she had a dress altered. Jessie had heard some talk of Mrs Temple’s maid leaving, and she was afraid, she said, that it might be proposed to her to take the place, besides waiting on Mrs Weir.

‘Impossible!’ I observed. ‘We couldn’t hear of such a thing, Jessie; you musn’t think of it.’

‘I don’t, you may depend upon that,’ she replied. ‘I said to

the cook, when she told me it had been suggested, that I should leave at once if it was at all insisted upon. Why, Ursie, a girl might well have two days in one to get through all her work if she has to wait upon Mrs Temple. She sits before the glass, when she is dressing, fidgeting with her hair, and her maid standing behind her, just as though there was nothing else in the world to be thought of but that she should look her best, and the morning is gone before one has time to look round. I will do anything in the world for Mrs Weir; but I would rather fifty times over scrub the floor than attend upon Mrs Temple.'

'You must keep your own ground, Jessie,' I said. 'It is the only way with Mrs Temple. But take care to be respectful to her.'

'I am that, I think,' said Jessie, 'and the servants tell me I am a favourite; but it is not home, Ursie.'

That was the root of the matter! and I don't think there was any want of affection in my manner then, as I tried to console her, telling her that Sandcombe was a home whilst I was in it, and that God would never leave her without one if I were removed from it. The way in which she listened to me made me feel what Mrs Weir was doing for her, leading her to the right comfort, and showing her by example that religion is a dress to be worn every day, and not kept for Sunday. It was the one thing Jessie needed to give her strength,—and how charming she would be if she had it! only I wished I could be quite sure that nothing was kept back from me. Roger, like me, noticed Mrs Weir's influence. He and I went with Jessie half across the down, and we talked about serious things, chiefly about a sermon upon trust which Mr Richardson had preached that afternoon. His remark to me afterwards was, 'A written sermon may be good, Ursie, and a spoken one better; but an acted one is the best of all. Jessie has gained a whole year in thought and principle since she has been with Mrs Weir.'

I was not sure myself whether it was so much as a year, but time would show.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE Saturday after that I went into Hove for some shopping and marketing, and Mary Kemp with me. I stopped at Longside on my way back, and had a cup of tea, and sent the parcels home in the chaise, intending to walk myself. We expected the farmer and John Hervey to come in about the same time, and I hoped that Roger might make his appearance too, as he also had been into Hove ; but, finding they were late, I did not like to wait, and set out to walk home alone, leaving word for Roger that I meant to go through Dene. The Prices were, I knew, absent, so I thought I might take their road, which shortened the way. I never ventured on such a liberty when they were at home, though there was in fact a right of way through the grounds for every one. The place was kept in good order, and as I had not seen the garden for some time, I asked the gardener if I might go in at one of the little gates of the shrubbery and walk round. The plantation, which I remembered as a collection of stunted shrubs, intersected with sandy walks, was now grown into a little copse of thick trees, pleasantly shading the house. Passing through it, I crossed the turf and went down to the lower pond that I might have a full view of the garden. The foliage of the trees was beautifully fresh and green ; the flower beds on the sloping lawn were filled with roses ; the turf was as smooth as on the day I first looked upon it, smooth as no other turf ever was in my eyes. There stood the low stone house with its bow windows, and trellised verandah sheltered on one side by the steep, woody bank, in which was cut the rough flight of steps leading to my favourite seat ; whilst behind rose the darker mass of trees planted in the hollow of the down, and the stone column above them raising its head, as it were, to meet the white clouds which floated majestically across the summer sky. It was very lovely and intensely quiet. The fountains were not playing, so that there was not even the splash of water to break the stillness ; and when the old clock over the stables struck six, it gave no impression of a disturbing sound, but only of a solemn voice bidding me mark and ponder upon the silence.

I took off my bonnet for coolness, and sat down upon a bench to rest, for I was very tired. My thoughts carried me back to the days gone by when Dene was my home. They were thoughts that seemed to have no direct purpose. They might rather be

called attempts at recollection, which were almost like a dream, there was so little connection in them. But they were very pleasant, even though some sadness mingled with them. I indulged them, not thinking how time was going on; so little conscious indeed of what was passing at the moment, that before I was aware of a footstep I felt two hands on my shoulders and a kiss on my forehead, and, starting up, saw Roger behind me.

'How could you frighten me so?' I exclaimed. 'I did not know you were near.'

'I thought it was the kindest way,' he said. 'It ought not to frighten you; I always came upon you so when you were a child.'

'Only, I am not a child now,' I replied, laughing, 'and so I am not accustomed to be "come upon." Is it late? must we go?' and I stood up.

'Not yet,' he said, 'there is no hurry,' and he threw himself on the grass at my feet. 'It looks very pleasant, Trot.'

'Very,' I said, and I sighed, and sat down again.

'Very,' he repeated—'but I would not go back to be as we were.'

I was silent.

'I would not go back to be as we were,' he repeated. 'I would rather take the hope of what we may be.'

'O Roger!' I exclaimed, 'never. If a home in Canada were Paradise, it could never be to us like Dene; and you know?—'

'What do I know?' he said, and a half smile curled his lips.

I looked him full in the face, and then I brought out the words: 'You know I can never be with you.'

'Are you so sure of that, my little Trot?' he said.

He did not change countenance in the least, except that the curling smile seemed to spread so that he could with difficulty repress it.

'Sure,' because of William's condition,' I replied. 'I did think at one time that perhaps he would marry again, and so I should be set free, but I see no prospect of it now.'

'Neither do I,' was Roger's reply.

'Then I must stay,' I said. 'I could not leave him.'

'No, surely.'

'And I can never live with you,' I exclaimed. 'O Roger! can you bear it so quietly?'

He was silent.

'Can you bear it so quietly?' I repeated, and I felt the choking grief rise in my throat.

‘Suppose I stay too,’ he said. He turned round and looked at me earnestly.

I could not speak; I was afraid to misunderstand him.

He went on hurriedly:—‘We might do very well together, and it might be better in many ways, and we need not leave Sandcombe. We might be very happy; you and I, Trot, and’—he hesitated.

I started back, as I was about to fling my arms round his neck, for I heard the words—‘Jessie Lee, if she will have me.’

I have tried to exercise self-control on many occasions. I never struggled so hard as at that moment.

In a calm, forced, yet gentle tone, at least, I think it was gentle, I said—‘Roger, dear, when did that thought come into your mind?’

He leaned his head upon his hands, as he answered—‘From her childhood, I believe—but I don’t know, don’t ask me, Ursie. It might have been better that I had never seen her.’

The impulse I felt to speak out my thoughts was checked. It was no dawning love, that I could battle with it. It was a deep-seated affection, and I must accept it. My heart was crushed with a pressure which few could understand, but I said, as I passed my hand fondly over his head—‘If she will make you happy, no one will wish that you had never seen her.’

‘You don’t like it,’ he exclaimed, and he rose up.

‘I can’t say; talk of yourself,’ I replied. ‘Had we not better go home?’

‘There is no hurry. Surely you can spare me five minutes, Ursie.’

Instead of answering him I walked on. He followed me. We said nothing for several minutes, at length Roger spoke again.

‘I don’t know why I have mentioned it to you, except that I can’t keep anything from you. It may all come to nothing. I have no reason to think she cares for me; perhaps,’ and he paused, ‘perhaps the reverse. I thought I would ask you first, for you would know.’

‘Do you mean whether she loves any one else?’ I said.

‘Yes, she might, and I am so much older,—like her father,—she may be afraid of me.’

‘Dear Roger,’ I said, ‘those are questions which no one ought to answer but Jessie herself. If I were to give you my opinion

twenty times over, you would not take it. No is never no, unless it is said by the right person.'

'And you won't give me hope?' he said.

'I will give you neither hope nor fear. If, upon due consideration,' and I know that I stressed the words, 'you think that Jessie Lee is the woman above all others likely to make you a good, useful, sensible wife, then go and ask her yourself; you are your own master, and she is her own mistress.'

I felt quite sure that I had pained him, and my heart reproached me for my tone.

'You can't understand, Ursie,' he said, after a pause; and a dagger's thrust could not have given me the anguish of those few words.

'I can; yes,—I can, indeed,' I exclaimed,—and I spoke truth; for a dawn of light had broken upon me. 'It is you, Roger,—but don't let us talk about that;—you know how I love you,—only be happy.'

He repeated the word happy in a doubtful tone, adding, 'One can't be happy in suspense.'

We were then on the top of the down. Roger stopped irresolute. I saw what was in his thoughts. He looked towards Compton. 'Are you going that way?' I said. I turned in the other direction, but he delayed me. 'Ursie, I can't bear this; you must stay and listen to me. God knows how I have fought with myself, and He knows also how I have thought of you.'

We sat down upon the heather, and I prayed that I might bear what was coming. He continued: 'I told you that I had loved Jessie from a child; but I never deceived you. I did not know it,—and you have been dearest always;—you are dearest now, in your own way. The two affections cannot interfere. You will not lose a brother, you will only gain a sister.'

'Please, Roger, dear,' I said, 'if you will only not think of me. It is all right,—quite right; but I was not prepared. I wish only to see you happy.'

'That does not satisfy me,' he replied. 'I don't care for my own happiness. If I could feel that I was injuring you, Trot, I would give up my hope at this moment, though with it I should give up all that makes life dear; and it has not been till to-day that I have felt I could think of myself without injustice to you.'

'O Roger!' I said, and the tears, which I had so long been striving to retain, burst forth against my will; 'injustice is such a cold, cold word.'

'But I must use it,' he said. 'It has been in my mind always, that if I did marry, it should not be selfishly. You were my first claim, Ursie, and if I could not have formed a new home without turning you out of the old one, I would have lived and died unmarried.'

'That would have been little kindness to me,' I said,—'to make me feel that I stood in the way of your happiness.'

'But you should not have felt it,' he replied. 'I could have crushed my love, and I would have done so, through God's help, and you should never have known it.'

'You think little of a woman's penetration,' I said.

'But I have done it,' he replied. 'If I had been obliged to return to Canada, neither you nor Jessie would ever have known what was in my heart.'

'Not Jessie!' I exclaimed.

'No, not Jessie; the climate would have killed her. I knew it, for I asked the question of the doctor at Compton. And, Ursie, it would have cost her no pang. She would have married another, without any thought of me. She may do so now.'

The tone in which he spoke was inexpressibly sad and anxious. I could but answer, though my voice seemed to fail me, 'Roger, she must love you, you will be happy.'

A brilliant smile passed over his face. 'My precious little Trot, always my comforter. But I want to speak more of you now, to tell you how things have come about. William and I talked over business matters this morning. He knows his own state now, he is not fit to manage the farm, and he wishes me to take it from him. That might be better than Canada, Ursie. He will have his home with us still; we shall be together, as we were for those few happy weeks, when Jessie was staying with us. And William sees things rightly as regards you, Ursie. He knows that he must make a provision for you, and he is willing to do so, now that he has no other claim. You will be no loser.'

I tried to stop him, but he continued: 'I must say it, because it has been a chief thought with me. To leave you to the chance of struggling on in the world, as best you might, after all we have been to each other, would bring a curse upon me. I couldn't do it, even though it were to save Jessie from a life like it. I knew that I must see you out of the mire before I

thought of myself, and now God has opened the way to carry out my wish. O Ursie! can't you say to me that you think His blessing will be on it.'

I pressed his hand,—no words would come.

'She is not what you expected for me, I know,' he said, answering what he felt to be in my mind. 'But, Ursie, I could not love a grave, staid woman of my own age.'

'No,' I replied, 'I am aware of that. I feel what you want, Roger; but,—let me say it now, for I may never do so again,—are you sure that you know Jessie?'

'I have seen her,' he exclaimed, 'in times of trial: I have watched her through Mrs Morris's illness, and when she was with us; and now, troubled as she is by her life at Stonecliff. Whatever she may have been as a child, Ursie, sorrow has, through God's grace, made her a noble woman.'

I could not tell him the depth of my fear that the change as yet was not to be relied upon for a continuance. I had even then learned that it is no part of true wisdom to endeavour to give our own impression, to the disparagement of any individual, when the person with whom we are conversing, and from whom we differ, has the same facts as ourselves from which to judge. The unfavourable opinion has no effect except to excite a suspicion of prejudice, and the words hastily spoken leave behind them wounds which perhaps will never be healed. What I said of Jessie at that moment might influence the whole of our future lives.

Roger waited for me to reply; but, instead of doing so, I kissed him once more tenderly, and whispered: 'God guide you to what is best; I can't, Roger,' and turned away.

And I was blind, senselessly blind! I had not seen, what was self-evident to the eyes of others; I was surprised at the existence of feelings which I had myself been instrumental in no slight measure in bringing about!

I confess all;—I can only say for myself, in excuse, that others have done likewise. As in illness, so most frequently in love, the persons most deeply interested are the last to perceive the existence of danger.

But had I really any right to consider it danger? When I rushed up to my room, and poured out, to Him who alone could comfort me, the bitter anguish of 'the wounded spirit—which who can bear?' was I justified in my wretchedness? Let those fear to judge who have never been similarly tried.

Yet without doubt I was selfish and unreasonable in my love for Roger. I had found in him all I needed to satisfy my imagination and my reverence; and my affection had indeed so engrossed me that I scarcely thought about other men except to feel that they were his inferiors. I may not be believed when I say this, but it is true. But in this overpowering feeling I forgot that I did not stand in the same relation to him. I filled the place which in God's providence was intended to be second, and I thought it the first; because the first was vacant. The world saw it. Again and again I had been told that Roger would marry, but I clung to the image of my own love, reflected in his, and in my heart felt myself wiser than the world. This was the root of bitterness. If Jessie had been an angel of goodness, I must still have been wretched for the time, for the foundation on which I had unconsciously built up my fabric of earthly happiness was undermined. But the circumstances of my trial were aggravated, as it appeared to me, a hundredfold by Roger's choice: Jessie was unworthy of him. She might be gentle, sweet tempered, winning in manner, anxious to act rightly, but she was essentially inferior to him, and Roger was blind in not perceiving it. I acknowledged his consideration, his generous thought for myself, his singular unselfishness. I longed to be grateful. I hoped I was so; but his weakness I could not forgive.

As we go on in life, we open our eyes to the facts of human inconsistency, and, knowing that all are fallible, we cease to expect infallibility. But it is not so when we are young and the first dawning upon the mind of a failing in one whom we respect, is one of the most painful trials which at that age we can be called upon to bear. When I thought of Roger as deceived, deluded, caught by a sweet smile, and the expression of a passing wish to do right, which might never be carried into action, I felt as though I had no longer any judgment upon which to rest. He had erred in this case, the most important upon which a man can be called upon to decide, and he might err in others likewise. Even if Jessie were to refuse him, it would not comfort me. He had loved her—that was enough. The dreariness and disappointment which took possession of me I can never describe. As I sat down on a low seat by my bedside, I felt deadened. Prayer, all powerful though it was, could not restore my dream of human perfection. I do not know how long I remained alone. It grew quite dark. I heard Martha moving

about below, and William's voice called out for candles, and I thought I ought to go down-stairs to him ; but I made an excuse to myself because of my grief. I let him stay by himself, and fancied that I was excused from attending upon him. The moon rose slowly over the hill, and its cold light streamed in upon my room. I knew that Roger must soon return. I was sure he had been to Compton, and had seen Jessie ; and I went to the window, which looked out upon the lane, and watched for his coming. I thought I could tell even by the way he walked whether his mission had been prosperous. I had not long to wait. A dark figure stood upon the brow of the hill, full in the moonlight. Never before had I seen Roger draw near without a thrill of untold love and delight ; now, nervous and heartsick, I watched his footsteps, counting them as it were by the beatings of my heart, and scarcely able to restrain myself from rushing out to upbraid him with his folly, and pour out the full tide of my doubts and my complaints of Jessie, even before I had heard his story.

God is more merciful to us than we know in withholding the opportunity of speech when we most desire to have it. Roger went into the parlour, and found William there alone. I heard him inquire for me, and he was coming up-stairs, but William detained him. They talked together for nearly a quarter of an hour, and in that time I had leisure to recover myself. Martha took in supper, and I was compelled to go down. William was suffering very much from his eyes, and was out of spirits. Roger exerted himself to amuse him, and we talked upon indifferent subjects ; and after supper I read a little to him out of the newspaper which Roger had brought from Hove. Then came prayers, family prayers,—never more blessed than on that night. When I heard Roger's solemn and most earnest voice, speaking from the depths of his heart, the bitterness and exaggeration of my feelings died away in self-reproach, and I felt that I, not he, had in God's sight been weak and worthy of condemnation. That was a good preparation for what was to follow ; but the trial was still great. Roger came up to my room—happy, so intensely happy, he neither saw nor imagined any want of sympathy on my part. Jessie had accepted him, with more love, more humility, trust, and simple religious feeling than even in his most sanguine moments he had anticipated. He could with difficulty bring himself to tell me how he managed to see her. The little details of his message, and the excuse he had made of

having a parcel to give her, and the circumstance of Mrs Temple's having gone out to dinner,—all important to me,—were scarcely remembered. He could only say, again and again, 'Ursie, God is too good to me; it frightens me. She is an angel.' And I could only reply, 'Dearest, may God grant you to be happy with her!'

CHAPTER L.

I ROSE the next morning at my usual hour, after a disturbed night. There was but little shock in the waking, for thoughts of Roger had been with me all night. I dressed myself mechanically, thinking of him still. I went about my work with this one idea present to me. Everything I saw, heard, or did, had reference to it. A change had come over life, such as that which I have heard described as experienced by the man who fell into a trance, and was aroused from it after a lapse of fifty years. I found myself grown old and independent, and I marvelled to see that others could quietly pursue their ordinary occupations. If I could have had my will, I would have bade the world, at least my own little world, stop in its course, wind up its affairs, bid farewell to the past, and begin for the future a new life, with new hopes, and, in some degree, new principles.

But life seldom knows such sudden breaks. We must all pass through the period of transition, more trying to the temper, if not the feelings, than the fulness of sorrow or of joy. Roger called me to him after breakfast, and asked what I was going to do with myself all day.

'A good many things,' I answered; 'it is washing day, and I shall be very busy.'

'You wouldn't have time, I suppose, for a walk. Jessie wants very much to see you.'

'Perhaps she had better come over here,' I answered. 'I can't see her with any comfort at Stonecliff.'

'She said she was afraid it was impossible. Mrs Weir is more ill than usual.'

'Is she? You never told me that,' I said, quickly.

'I thought you knew it,' was Roger's reply.

'No,' I said. 'I seldom go near Stonecliff now. Is Jessie anxious about her?'

'She did not seem so; only she thought it wouldn't quite do to ask for a holiday. But that won't last long now, Ursie.'

I thought for a few seconds, feeling strangely aggravated. Then I said: 'I will try and go over in the course of the afternoon; but I must go alone.'

He looked sorely disappointed. 'Yes,' I said, 'you must let me see Mrs Weir and Mrs Temple, and tell them the state of things; and then if you want to see Jessie there will be no difficulty. But it won't do, Roger, to have people making remarks, as they are sure to do if you don't give your reasons for seeking Jessie's company.'

'Well,' he said, 'I suppose you are right. Nothing stops people's mouths like being open about your affairs. And neither Jessie nor I have anything to hide in the matter.'

'And I suppose you will tell William this morning,' I said.

'I have told him; I spoke to him before I said anything to you. Only I begged him not to mention the matter, because I wanted to have it out with you myself.'

I am afraid something in my countenance betrayed the annoyance which I felt in my heart. William to be told before me! I could not have imagined it.

'You are vexed with me, my little Trot,' said Roger, kindly; 'but I mustn't have you misunderstand. William is such a chief person in all our plans, that if he had greatly objected, the whole thing might have fallen to the ground. I was bound, therefore, to find out his mind upon the matter first.'

A very matter-of-fact answer; but it did not soothe my ruffled feelings. I walked away, but he followed me. 'Ursie, darling, the first day of the new happiness is not to be the last of the old, is it?'

I answered him by a burst of tears. He sat down by me in the window-seat, and drew me fondly towards him; but the touch of his hand was to me like the touch of cold lead, and I withdrew myself from him, saying: 'I'm very wicked, Roger, I know. You ought to hate me, and you will, for I hate myself.'

'You are jealous, Ursie,' he replied, gravely. 'I suppose I ought to have been prepared for it. But I thought you loved Jessie so well, that you looked on her as a sister already.'

'Look on her!' I exclaimed. 'Yes, Roger; but what is

that? You would know if you were a woman; but you can't—you are a man.'

'Then, perhaps, I had better not try to know,' he said, in the same grave tone; and he stood up to leave me. I could not bear that. I took hold of his hand, and looked piteously in his face. My heart was so full, I felt as though it would burst. 'O Roger! love me,' I said. And he stooped down and pressed his lips to my forehead, and I threw my arms round him and kissed him as in former days, with the yearning tenderness of my exceeding love; and then the cold blank fell upon my heart again, and I knew that I had said farewell to that first joy of my youth for ever.

I had strong, passionate, exaggerated affections, but I had also a certain share of right principle and common sense. And what was often almost equally important to me, I was keenly sensible of the slightest absence of sympathy, or want of perception of the nature of my feelings in those with whom I lived. I might give way to an outburst of grief or joy under the pressure of excitement; but the slightest change of voice, or shade of indifference in manner, restored me to my self-possession; and I could then quietly take out my feelings, as it were, and looking at them by the light in which they were seen by the world, keep them under stern control, and compel myself for the future to show only so much as my friends could comprehend and appreciate.

After that interview with Roger, I felt lowered in my own eyes. He could not understand, neither would others. 'To be so distressed at the idea of a brother's marriage with a person whom I had known, and in a certain way loved all my life, must to the world be a simple absurdity,—more especially when Roger was about to remain in England instead of making for himself a home in Canada. Many, probably, will scarcely believe that I would rather have been parted from him for years, with the full conviction that I was first in his affections, and that I could still look up to him without distrust of his judgment, than have lived with him for the remainder of my life, under present circumstances, in the most perfect English home that could be offered me. But so it was. I said it to myself in so many words, and then I added: 'That is my view of the case; now I will see what is required of me by the opinion of the world.'

I must prepare myself first for congratulations; and self-

respect and feeling for Roger and Jessie demanded that I should receive them cheerfully, in the spirit in which they were offered. Let the bitterness be what it might, no one must know it. Another trial, and perhaps a worse one, would be the necessity of a thoroughly cordial, affectionate meeting with Jessie. That must be gone through immediately, the sooner the better. When I understood her view of her future position, I should be better able to determine in what way to regard my own; and there must be no further exhibition of feeling with Roger. Either it would deaden his affection, or make his home wretched. I had been weak, but he should be taught to look upon the feeling as a temporary jealousy; he should never be reminded how deep was the wound he had unconsciously made. I looked at all these necessities calmly, and with somewhat of a feeling of strength. To be without aim or purpose in trouble, that it was which tried me. When I had once made up my mind what I was to do, and what I should be called upon to struggle against, I could be comparatively satisfied; and I prayed now that God would help me to keep my resolution, for I knew that my stumbling-block was self-confidence.

About eleven o'clock William was accustomed to come in from the field, and take a glass of ale and a bit of bread. He liked rather to linger about then and talk, for he was beginning, poor fellow! to feel the days long. I knew that would be the time when I must hear what he might have to say about Roger and Jessie,—how naturally the two names seemed already to run together!—and I took my needlework into the parlour about ten minutes before the time, and sat down waiting for him. He came in, drank off his glass of beer, and began upon the subject at once. 'Well, Ursie, what do you say to the new plans? odd enough, aren't they?'

'Not odd that Roger should stay in England,' I said. 'It is the best thing that can be done, and as to Jessie'—

'She is not the kind of girl I should have thought would have taken his fancy,' continued William. 'But one never knows. Yet somehow, Ursie, I think if it was not for you he might find he had made a blunder.'

'Jessie will learn how to manage things, I dare say,' I said; 'and it gives her a home.'

'Yes, it does that; and—well, it might have been worse. Only I looked to his marrying a woman with some money.'

'I think that is just one of the reasons why he has thought

of her,' I replied, remembering an expression which Roger had let fall when he told me that he could not, even for Jessie, have married to leave me to struggle alone. 'He felt for her, I am sure.'

'He had no cause to do that,' answered William, quickly. 'He knows she has as much as she had a right to expect—more, indeed; and we have all been very kind to her. If my poor Leah had been her sister twenty times over, she could not have done more for her. But Roger always was crotchety from a boy. However, he is going to marry her now, and there is an end of the matter.'

William hurried away much sooner than usual; and that was all the help or consolation I was to receive from him. I began to feel very lonely, not the less so because I was setting out for Stonecliff.

In the afternoon, Roger came to me and gave me a note to take to Jessie. How to manage my visit I could not tell. First I thought I would go direct to Mrs Temple; then I decided that it would be a breach of confidence with Jessie; and again I was perplexed as to what I should say to soften the trouble to Mrs Weir. The very thinking about these things did me a great deal of good, and by the time I arrived at Stonecliff I was a little excited, and as much fidgeted, as a person need be who wishes to act wisely under trying circumstances. There is nothing so good for preserving the balance of common sense as a dose of matter-of-fact worries.

'I want to see Miss Lee,' was my address to the saucy little page who opened the door, and I spoke in a determined tone, to assure him there could be no doubt as to my gaining my point.

'He did not know'—pages never do know—'whether such an interview was possible.' But I urged him to decision by insisting that, if I could not see Miss Lee, I must see Mrs Weir, or Mrs Temple, or some one; and I made my way into the hall, and seeing the door of the little breakfast-room open, and knowing that it was very seldom used, I said, 'I will just wait here, and you can let Miss Lee know that I want to see her.'

He stared at me, but finding that I was not open to any impressions of awe, he left me.

I confess I felt uncommonly nervous. I sat down and tapped my foot upon the floor, then I stood up and looked at the pictures on the wall, then I walked to the window and watched a boy weeding one of the flower-beds, and at last I went to the door

and listened. Distant sounds in the kitchen, those were all I could hear, and I thought the page had proved faithless, and was upon the point of seeking him out and expostulating, but a light footstep came along the passage at the top of the stairs, and the next minute Jessie had thrown herself into my arms, her face covered with blushes, as she exclaimed—‘O Ursie! isn’t it too happy?’

How thankful I was for her excitement, I really could not attempt to say. It saved me completely. I don’t believe she in the least suspected any coldness on my side. She was so full of her own delight, that it never entered her thoughts that every one else was not to be delighted too. And then Roger was to stay in England, and she was to live at Sandcombe, dear Sandcombe; she had never loved any place so well, and I was to be with her, and to be her sister. She was in a perfect ecstasy of happiness. I didn’t know whether it was hard in me to think that this childish exuberance was not quite the tone I should have desired for Roger’s wife, but of course I did not attempt to check her. All that I really had set my heart upon discovering was the full extent of her feeling for him. Even this it was not easy to obtain: she was surprised, grateful, flattered, and rather awestruck. ‘She could not have supposed it possible,’ she said, ‘so good he was! so much respected, and so much older too! At first she could not believe it. Love him?—oh, yes!—she loved him better than any one else in the whole world, and she knew that I loved him so much too, and we should all live together, that was the delightful thing: and to have a home of her own would be so nice, though she should be very sorry to leave Mrs Weir who had been so kind to her.’

Oh dear! I don’t know what there was in it all which made my spirits sink lower and lower, till at length even Jessie herself remarked that I looked grave, and inquired if anything was the matter, and if I felt ill.

‘No,’ I said, ‘not at all, only a little tired with my walk; and you know, Jessie, these are exciting days.’

‘Very. I lay awake for hours last night. It seems so very strange. Did you ever think, Ursie, that Roger could be fond of me?’

‘We are all fond of you,’ I answered evasively.

‘Yes, to be sure, and we have known each other all our lives. But then he is so superior. Do you know, I think I am a little afraid of him; and I told him so.’

‘You won’t love him the less for that,’ I said; ‘and, Jessie, I will tell you this about Roger, there is nothing in the world that you need fear with him except not being open upon all points; you won’t mind my saying that, will you?’

‘No, of course, we are sisters.’ But Jessie did not look quite comfortable.

‘I don’t know any one who can understand things, or make allowances as he can,’ I continued. ‘But then he must have full trust placed in him.’

‘He is strict,’ said Jessie.

‘Strict with himself, and that makes him appear strict to other people. But only try him, Jessie. Say out everything to him, and then see if all will not go smoothly.’

She did not speak directly; when she did, it was merely to say that she was longing for Mrs Weir to know everything: Roger was so impatient for all to be settled, but she did not like to mention it herself.

Something—it was very trifling—in her manner gave me the impression that she was turning away from a disagreeable subject. I had a strong inclination to pursue it whether she liked it or not. If I had loved her heartily, I should have done so, but I stood upon doubtful ground. So I only replied by a remark upon Mrs Weir’s health.

Jessie’s face was bright again directly. Mrs Weir, she said, was much worse than usual, and there had been a fuss with Mrs Temple. She did not, of course, know what it was all about, but she had an idea that it had something to do with money and a letter from Miss Milicent. She had heard Mrs Temple say there would be no money forthcoming, and the only thing to be done was to leave Mr Weir to go to ruin again his own way. And then Mrs Weir had been very nervous, and cried a good deal, and Mrs Temple had scolded her.

It was not a very hopeful condition of affairs, considering the communication I had to make. I should only be adding to the family disturbance. Yet I felt that in justice to Roger I must not delay.

‘I must see Mrs Temple, Jessie, dear,’ I said, ‘and tell her everything: I promised Roger I would.’

She blushed painfully. ‘Must you? I had not thought of that. She will be angry, and—but it is very kind of you, Ursie; you always help me out of difficulties.’

‘And I must see her at once,’ I said, ‘if she is in the house.’

Jessie was not quite in such a hurry ; she looked, but did not move towards the door. 'Will you go?' I added.

'Yes ; but, Ursie, Mrs Temple is not very good-natured, you know that.'

'Better than you do, perhaps ; though I don't see what her good or ill-nature can have to do with the present business.'

'I don't think she has liked me quite so well lately ; you know what I told you about the letters.'

'I know everything, dear Jessie ; I know Mrs Temple fifty times better than you do, only go now, and ask if I may speak with her.'

'And if she should say unkind things, you won't believe them,' continued Jessie.

'I will believe nothing of which there is not proof,' I said ; 'but one would think you were afraid of being accused of murder? If there is anything to tell, why not say it to me now?'

'Oh ! there is nothing ; nothing, you misunderstand. It is all foolishness,' she exclaimed. 'But Mrs Temple was angry at my going over to Dene one afternoon, when Mrs Weir let me take a walk, and she has been cross ever since, and then'—— I think Jessie meant to say more, but at that instant Mrs Temple entered the room, and Jessie hurried away without saying even good-bye.

CHAPTER LI.

I HAD not spoken to Mrs Temple since the day when I had my interview with Cotton, and I was sure that she must have felt herself injured from the fact of my having seen Mrs Weir then without her permission, to say nothing of my having been the recipient of Cotton's complaints. But possessing a clear conscience upon these points, I was able to look her boldly in the face, and I curtsied, and said that I hoped I had not come at an inconvenient time, but I had a little business with Jessie.

'It would be better, another time, if you were to send word beforehand when you wish for an interview,' said Mrs Temple, standing, and making me stand also. 'Miss Lee is much engaged, and Mrs Weir is not as well as usual.'

'I am sorry, ma'am,' I replied, 'but I had also something to say to yourself, if you could be so good as to spare me a few minutes.'

She took out her watch.

'I have an engagement almost immediately, perhaps you will let your communication be brief.'

'It is soon made, ma'am,' I replied. 'Jessie Lee is engaged to be married to my brother Roger, and as she will be wishing to leave Mrs Weir almost immediately, I thought it better to let you know.'

A cloud came over Mrs Temple's face as though I had actually done her an injury. 'Very singular!' she exclaimed; 'Miss Lee gave me no idea of any plan of the kind. I have not been treated fairly.'

'The engagement was only made yesterday, ma'am,' I replied; 'we have taken the earliest opportunity of informing you.'

'There was an agreement,' continued Mrs Temple, 'and Miss Lee suits Mrs Weir very fairly well. I consider that I had a right to expect more consideration.'

'Jessie will, I have no doubt, be anxious to remain with Mrs Weir, if possible, until some one is found to take her place,' I replied; 'but of course I can make no promise, as everything must depend on my brother's plans.'

'Your brother is a rash young man,' said Mrs Temple, looking at me searchingly. 'I should recommend him to inquire before he commits himself to the step he contemplates. You may tell him so.'

'My brother will, no doubt, be obliged to you for your advice, ma'am,' I replied; 'but as he is past thirty, I imagine he considers himself able to judge in such a matter for himself. I should not, therefore, like to interfere.'

'Age may not imply wisdom,' said Mrs Temple. 'Has your brother known this young woman long?'

'From her childhood, ma'am,' I replied, and turning from the unpleasant subject, I added: 'May I ask how long you think it will be before Jessie will be able to leave Mrs Weir, without inconveniencing her?'

'I can't say. Your brother has known this young woman long? Does he know her friends and acquaintances?'

'Nearly all of them, I believe, ma'am,' I replied.

'Nearly all, you believe. It would be better if it were quite

all. I give the caution with no unfriendly feeling. Good morning. I must request you not to attempt to see Mrs Weir, she is too ill.'

I was not to be treated in that way,—and I followed Mrs Temple into the hall. 'Excuse me, ma'am,' I said, 'but I can't hear hints given against Jessie. My brother's happiness is involved. If you would only be good enough to explain what you refer to.'

'I give no explanations. I am not the person to bring forward accusations. Your brother will judge for himself when he inquires.'

I had no power of detaining her; she sailed past me,—her pony-chaise was at the door, and she drove off, leaving me to my own conjectures. I went back to the little room, and sat for a few moments in thought. Then I rang the bell, and asked again if I might see Miss Lee. The message brought back was that I was to go up to Mrs Weir's room.

I was in utter perplexity. Disobey Mrs Temple's express wishes I could not, for she had a right to expect obedience—but if Mrs Weir really wanted to see me, I might do her harm by refusing. I sent word to Jessie that she must do as I said—she must come to me, and almost before I thought the message could have reached her, she was with me. But it was only to entreat that I would not lose a moment, that I would go instantly to Mrs Weir, for she was very ill—very strange—it was impossible to know what to make of her, and Jessie was so pale and trembling, that I could not doubt her having real cause for alarm.

'She takes it to heart dreadfully,' whispered Jessie to me, as we stood at the door of Mrs Weir's sitting-room.

'To heart! you have not told her, Jessie, suddenly?'

'You said she was to know, and I thought you were in the house, and it was better over. But, Ursie, I never saw her in such a way. Do go in. She will listen to you.'

I don't wonder that Jessie was frightened. Mrs Weir was in a perfect agony of nervous distress, rocking herself backwards and forwards in her chair, crying like a child,—and murmuring from time to time, 'All alone! all alone!—yes, they all go—they won't let me go too—all alone!'

Jessie went behind her chair. I motioned to her to keep out of the way, and went up to Mrs Weir. 'Dear ma'am,' I said, 'you are not all alone, for there is some one here who cares for

you very much. You always used to say that you were sure Ursula would never leave you, and you see she does not.'

She grasped my hand like a vice; I did not know she had so much strength in her.

'You have left me,' she said, 'there is no one but Jessie now, and she is going too. If God would but take me—no one goes away in heaven.'

'That will come in His good time, dear ma'am,' I said; 'but you have often told me that He stays with us, whoever of our earthly friends may chance to leave us.'

'I am very wicked. God pardon me, Ursula,—I used to love you,—now I love Jessie. I will try not to love any one again.'

'Would not that be wrong, dear ma'am?' I said. 'God means us to love one another surely. And no one has left off loving you. You can't think I have.'

'Yet, Ursula, you do not come to me, and you have kept things back from me, and you would not let me have what I wanted from the farm, and then Cotton talked to you, and that did her harm, and she went away, and now you are wishing Jessie to go too. I would not have treated you so, Ursula, for I loved you very much.'

My heart sank, and in the extremity of my vexation I burst into tears. The poor lady softened towards me in an instant. The sight of my distress roused her from her own.

'Do not cry, Ursula,' she said; 'it makes me sad—and I do not want that; and I am going to bear it all now, for it was wrong in me to care. Jessie Lee will marry and be very happy, and I like people to be happy. Perhaps God will some day let me be happy in heaven.'

I took hold of her hand, and kissed it many times. She gazed at me,—strangely and earnestly; then she said: 'They told me you would not help me.'

'Whoever told you that, told you what is false, ma'am,' I exclaimed. 'There does not live on the face of the earth a single human being who would help you, even to death, more truly than I, if I only knew the way.'

'Would you?' she replied, and she looked round the room timidly.

'Leave us for a minute, Jessie,' I said; and when the door was closed, I added: 'There is no one here now to listen, ma'am, so you can say out whatever is in your mind.' Mrs Weir hesi-

tated, her features worked nervously, and I could feel the quick, thin, interrupted beating of her pulse, as she laid her hand on mine. 'Ursula,' she said, in a low voice, 'my husband does not want me; but I must go to him, or I shall die. It lies here heavy on my heart,—but they will not think it. When they say I must not go, God lets me be tempted. I feel bitter things. I am not resigned to His will, and I strive—I strive; but the struggle is very weary. And I have had a thought sometimes lately, that I would go away, all by myself. It comes to me in the night, and I think I will get up and go, but it is an evil spirit that puts it into my head. It is an evil spirit, is it not? You know, because your mind is clear, and mine is tired; O Ursula! it is very tired; but it never rests from thinking.'

I was frightened, yet I did not suppose her brain was wandering, only strained; her words were calm and her look was quiet, though intensely mournful. My reply was from instinct,—I had no time for reflection.

'Dear ma'am,' I said, 'I don't think it is an evil spirit that puts the wish into your heart, for it seems to me quite natural; and now you have said it out to me, perhaps you will be better.'

'I ought not to have said it,' she said, turning her head quickly. 'My niece tells me that I am to crush the wish, and kill it, but it will not die. I have never told her of that wicked thought, that I would go away by myself. I have told you, Ursula, because I cannot help it. I have never told any one else; when you are with me I always think you love me.'

I answered as quickly and decidedly as I could, 'You don't merely think I love you, ma'am, but you know it; and there is nothing in the world to hinder you from speaking of anything you wish to me. God sees no harm in the wish to go away and join Mr Weir,—that I am quite certain of. The only trouble is how it is to be managed. But the way will no doubt be put before you soon if it is right, and till it is I know you will pray to God to give you patience.'

A smile more touching to me than tears stole over Mrs Weir's face. 'I could wait very long with hope,' she said; 'but, Ursula, are you sure?' and again the look of doubt was upon her,—'my niece says I ought to crush the wish.'

'Say it out, dear ma'am,' I replied. 'It will die away all the quicker for that, if it is fit that it should. You know,' I added, and I laughed a little, 'the steam does more mischief when it is kept in than when it is allowed to escape.'

‘I think so, Ursula. I feel better, and I will try and not think till you come to see me again. But then you never come now.’

‘I mean to come as often as I can, ma’am,’ I said; ‘you may always depend upon my doing my utmost to comfort you, and I shall have to ask you to help me about some work, for I want to make something pretty for Jessie when she is married.’

I was almost afraid what the effect of the allusion might be; but it was taken quietly, though mournfully, and Mrs Weir said,—‘Yes, she will leave me soon. She has been very kind to me, Ursula. I should like to give her something, that would please her, but my money is gone,—all I have to give. I must keep the rest, you know, it is wanted.’

‘You may knit her something, dear ma’am,’ I said; ‘she would value that more than anything else.’ Mrs Weir’s face brightened like a child’s with pleasure. ‘That is a good thought,’ she said. ‘I have some patterns for shawls; would you look in the drawer of my work-table, Ursula? I think you will find them there.’

The patterns were found and discussed; and one was chosen. The shawl was to be white, with a pink border. Mrs Weir threw herself into the idea with an animation which I fancied she had entirely lost, and before I left her I doubt whether the pain of parting with Jessie was not almost counterbalanced by the pleasure of working for her.

Jessie and I had but a few words together before I left the house,—and they were of no importance. I did not at the moment remember that I had intended to have spoken to her on the subject of Mrs Temple’s hints, for other cares were pressing on me. I had bound myself to Mrs Weir, by giving her sympathy and encouragement, in a way I did not perceive till I found myself walking alone over the hill, and able to think quietly upon what had passed. I was sure my words would not be forgotten, and I scarcely wished they should be. That interview had given me a more painful impression of the state of Mrs Weir’s mind, and the necessity of some interference, than I had ever had before. Of course I did not believe that Mrs Temple was willingly worrying Mrs Weir out of her senses. No doubt she had a good deal of reason on her side. But she was acting selfishly, and on a system; and persons who work upon others on system seem to forget that God has willed there should be infinite variety in this world, both in nature and in

human beings,—and that to suppose that what suits one will therefore suit another, is simply making ourselves out to be wiser than God. Mrs Temple, I knew, was strongly imbued with the belief that all persons' nervousness, except her own, could be cured by severity. I had often heard her say so; and Mrs Weir, in her simple timidity, acquiesced in the notion, and took the discipline bestowed upon her as medicine,—very disagreeable, but quite right for her to submit to; only unfortunately it did her no good. Yet when I say that I had a painful impression of the state of Mrs Weir's mind, I do not mean to imply that I thought she was going out of it. I had no idea of the kind. Mrs Weir saw all things truly—there was no distortion of facts, and no absence of the power of reasoning upon them. Even in her weakest, most irritable, and excitable moments, there never had been anything of that nature. It was merely that she was possessed (if I may so express myself) by one idea founded upon reason; and from bodily weakness, and an absence of self-discipline, allowed it to assume an exaggerated importance. Keeping this to herself in no way lessened the evil; rather it increased it, for the thoughts upon which we brood in secret are tenfold more oppressive than those which we openly discuss. The crushing and killing which Mrs Temple recommended would, I was sure, be of no avail. A thought which has a rational foundation cannot be killed; all we can do with it is to give it light and air, and see it in its true proportion. Mrs Temple treated poor Mrs Weir's conscientious scruple, about being absent from her husband, as she would one of those absurd, irrational fancies which are sometimes allowed to try persons otherwise perfectly reasonable, and which can only be destroyed by a vigorous effort of the will. Crush these for a time, and reason itself steps in afterwards to prove their folly. But to reason against reason is useless; and when conscience and reason act together, the difficulty becomes insurmountable.

I am putting down now the result of long observation. I had none of these thoughts on the day when I walked back from Stoncliff to Sandcombe, for, as I said before, I had been acting on instinct rather than reflection; but I could not help seeing that I had committed myself more than was perhaps prudent. I had held out to Mrs Weir the hope that something would be done to enable her to rejoin her husband, and I had explicitly told her that I would see her frequently, and that she

might depend upon me for comfort. Whether wise or unwise, I must keep my word, and that against any objection or interference on the part of Mrs Temple. Very much troubled I was as I thought of this, and when my mind turned to my usual adviser, Roger, I was met by the dispiriting conviction that I could not expect to gain his full sympathy, and scarcely his attention, and I resolved not to attempt it. It is unfair to try any individual beyond the ordinary limits of human power ; and a man in love is always to be looked upon as free, for the time being, from the claims of extensive sympathy ; not however from any principle of right or duty, but as a concession to that known infirmity of which we all partake. The knowledge of this fact was painful to me, but I felt safer and happier in not putting Roger to the test than in doing so with the risk of failure. I was already beginning to look upon him as subject to the same weaknesses as his fellow-creatures.

Mr Richardson was my only resource, and I determined to go over to Compton the first day I could, and put all I knew and felt before him. Even if he could not help me, I should then have at least the satisfaction of feeling that I was not acting entirely on my own responsibility.

I reached home just in time for tea. Roger and John Hervey met me at the farm-yard gate. Roger's face was full of eager expectation. He wanted me to come with him at once, and tell him all that had passed. John Hervey said, as Roger walked away, 'I hope they will be happy, Ursie. You don't want me to congratulate you.'

My heart bounded with a sense of relief. I looked up at him and said, 'Thank you, Mr Hervey, that is like a friend.'

He said not another word, and walked into the house, but I was brighter that evening than I had been since I heard of Roger's plans, for I felt that there was still some one in the world who understood me.

CHAPTER LII.

MR RICHARDSON was away attending upon his father, who was dying. Such was the information given me when I went to Compton to see him. I must manage, then, as

best I might, without his advice, and after some consideration I felt that it might be well to be bold, and make use of Jessie's affairs as an excuse for seeing Mrs Weir frequently. If I did not appear to perceive Mrs Temple's dislike, I hoped it might not actually be exerted against me; and if I could interest Mrs Weir, and help to keep her quiet, I might even become necessary. At any rate I would try. I thought too of Jessie much and anxiously. Mrs Temple's hints were by no means forgotten. I pondered upon them deeply, and again thought I would call upon her to explain them. But she had spoken proudly and angrily, and the more I considered what had passed, the less weight I was inclined to attach to her words. Jessie's life was no mystery. I seemed to know what she had done and said, I could almost add what she had thought, from childhood. Her intercourse with Mrs Price and acquaintance with Mr Macdonald were the only things which I could really disapprove, and I knew much better than Mrs Temple how far these had been carried. To make inquiries would be implying suspicion, and might involve explanations which I did not feel myself at liberty to give.

Neither could I say anything to Roger. I had always felt that before people are engaged one is free to offer general warnings, but that afterwards nothing but indisputable facts can justify interference. A man cannot break his promise because he hears what he ought to have been aware of before he made it. I had great trust, too, in Jessie herself. I saw no reason for thinking that anything serious was amiss. She had always given me her confidence, and the little air of secrecy I had observed in our interview at Stonecliff was accounted for by Mrs Temple's suspicious temper and prejudice. No doubt Mrs Temple disliked Mr Macdonald and Mrs Price, and thought that Jessie was unwise for having them for her friends. So did I. But Jessie knew this already. It could do no good to make a fuss about the matter, just at the moment when the acquaintanceship was likely, as I hoped, to be entirely broken off. Altogether I thought it better to say nothing, except continually to urge upon her the necessity of treating Roger with perfect openness. If she would do this, all would be well, and I could not but believe that as she knew him better, his gentleness and sympathy would win more and more upon her affections, and lead her to confide every thought and feeling to him.

So I went on, not blindly, not happily, but trying to make the best of a state of things which I felt could not be mended.

In six weeks only from the day of their engagement, Roger and Jessie were to be married. I suppose if the marriage had been the event which above all others I most desired, there would still have been some aggravations attending it. The mere upsetting of household arrangements, the discussions, the preparations, the little thoughtlessnesses and exclusivenesses, if one may use the word, of two persons who are all in all to each other, and feel that, for the time being, they are the pivot on which the world turns, must alone give rise to annoyances. But in my case there were other and much more serious causes for vexation. I say nothing of my own individual feeling with regard to Roger. I have already expressed it. If it is not understood, no words of mine will cause it to be so, and if it is, no further explanation will be needed. But as day after day went by, and I had fresh opportunities of studying Jessie's character, I became more disheartened and perplexed at the ignorance of Roger's choice, and the difficulties which were in preparation both for him and me. If I could have seen why he fell in love with Jessie, I fancied I could have been happier. But it was a moral problem which I was wholly unable to solve. A problem also was my future position at Sandcombe.

In his great kindness, his wish to make everything easy for every one, Roger was always saying that his marriage would make no change in the family. William was the master, I was the mistress, Jessie and he would live with us, and would do everything in their power to help us; but they had not the slightest wish to interfere. And Jessie was lavish in her promises, and, I am sure, perfectly sincere in her intentions. But at the very moment Roger was saying this, he was directing all that went on, both with regard to money matters and the management of the farm. William was becoming every day more unfit to look after his own affairs, and Roger was the responsible person not only in little daily matters, but even in actual business. He had thrown some of his money into the farm, laying it out in ways which were considered advantageous, upon the express understanding, and indeed the written agreement (for he was particular enough in such ways) that when the new lease was made out, which it would be, according to Mr Stewart's promise, very shortly, it was to be in his name. He would then be the master of Sandcombe, and his wife of course would be the mistress, and

what was I to be? I put the case before him, and to my exceeding surprise found that he actually would not see any difficulty in it;—though, if he had been an indifferent person, the awkwardness would have been as evident to him as the sun in the heavens! He said that I was wishing to draw lines where no lines could be drawn; that all would work well if left to itself; where people loved each other as we did, it must do so; that Jessie had the highest opinion of my judgment, and would be entirely guided by me; that he felt the same; and he added that he could not have thought of marrying with any idea of turning me out of the place which I had always held. As to names, they were nothing. What did it signify who was called mistress? Neither Jessie nor I had any foolish love of power, and for his own part he had not the slightest doubt of our working together delightfully. Much more he said of the same kind, and at the conclusion he left me with the conviction impressed more than ever on my mind, that names constitute one of the greatest moving powers of this fallen world; that every name implies relations and duties; and that to assume the name when we are unable to fulfil the duties belonging to it is to involve ourselves in inextricable confusion and wretchedness.

I did not say so to Roger, but I went to Mrs Kemp. It was just a fortnight before the wedding was to take place. The next day Jessie was to leave Mrs Weir, and come to us. I felt I must have my mind made clear upon this subject beforehand. Not that Jessie was likely to think about it, but I was quite sure she would feel; and persons who feel and don't think are the most difficult of all to manage. I had also a little business to settle with Mrs Kemp, as to the young person who was to fill Jessie's place. Mrs Kemp, in her kindness, had exerted herself to find one, in order that Jessie might the sooner be set free, and Jessie had given me some messages for her successor, and begged me to talk to her about Mrs Weir, so that I had to arrange a meeting with her. Strange it was that such duties should fall to my share, but I was, as I had anticipated, necessary just then at Stonecliff. Mrs Temple could not bear me, but she did not hesitate to make use of me; and as long as Mrs Weir was quieted by talking to me about the white shawl with the pink border, she put up with my presence. I think she began to feel that she might strain her authority over Mrs Weir too far. But enough of this; even Mrs Weir was but secondary at that time.

Mrs Kemp, like John Hervey, had never congratulated me upon Roger's intended marriage. She did not approve of Jessie Lee well enough to do so. But I think that just at first she had fancied that having Roger with me in England would make up for any disappointment. A very happy, prosperous, married woman herself, she did not quite picture to herself the vexations that a marriage may bring upon the persons only indirectly concerned in it. Her simple, good sense, would, however, I was sure, understand them the minute they were put before her. Of course I did not intend to speak to her of my own peculiar feeling for Roger. There was no one to whom I could open my heart upon that point, unless—it may seem strange, but I could have talked to Mrs Weir, if she had been well enough to listen.

I entered upon my subject immediately with Mrs Kemp. It was not a pleasant one, so the less delay the better. 'I am come,' I said, 'to consult you about the future. We are going to begin a new life at Sandcombe, and I should be glad to know how best to carry it out.'

'Surely, my dear,' said Mrs Kemp, and she rubbed her spectacles, put them on, and took up her work—signs that she meant to give me time and attention. 'Where is the difficulty?'

'Who is to be mistress?' I said. 'Roger thinks there can be two mistresses. I think there can't be.'

Mrs Kemp smiled. 'He would not like that there should be two masters, my dear. And I dare say he would quote the Bible to prove that the thing is impossible.'

I dare say he would, but he is very kind, and does not like to hear that I am to be turned out.'

'Yet it must come to that, and it seems to me, Ursie, that when a wound is to be made, it is kinder to do it with one cut than with half-a-dozen; but men are very tender-hearted.'

'I wish they were not,' I replied. 'If Roger had come to me at once, and agreed with me how things were to be, he might have been a great help to me. As it is—trying to make things easy, which can't be easy—he has left me to bear the burden alone. For I must see all truly,' I added.

'Quite right, my dear,' and Mrs Kemp patted my hand approvingly. 'As the farmer sometimes says to me when I grumble, "Patty, we are to fit our wishes to our circumstances, not our circumstances to our wishes." If Roger marries, and upsets your household, he must learn to look the change full in the face.'

‘Or I must,’ I said; ‘for I don’t expect much from him’ I am afraid I said it a little bitterly. Mrs Kemp thought that I alluded to his choice of a wife, and she answered, ‘It may turn out better than you expect, my dear. Marriage brings trouble, and if people are good for anything, trouble brings improvement. Jessie may be a very different person as a wife from what she has been as a girl; though to say she is what I thought Reger would have chosen, would be saying what is not true.’

‘Why did he choose her?’ I exclaimed.

‘Well, my dear, there may be a good deal said for him. I don’t know that he is different from most other men. Looking upon the world with my old eyes, it often seems to me that women are like the blocks in a barber’s shop, which each man dresses up to suit his own fancy. The block may be worth something, or it may not be, it matters little for the time being. What the man falls in love with is not the reality, but the appearance; so it happens that the cleverer, and better, and more kind-hearted a man is in himself, the more danger probably there is of his making a blunder in his choice, because, you see, he has such a charming notion of what a woman ought to be, all ready prepared in his mind, that he has nothing to do but to fit it to the first girl he meets, of a right age, and look, and manner, and there is his perfect wife, ready made.’

I sighed. It seemed to me just what Roger had done.

‘Jessie isn’t like you, my dear,’ continued Mrs Kemp.

‘No, indeed,’ I continued. ‘Dear Mrs Kemp, I may say it to you,—I could not to any one else,—I have loads of faults, terrible faults; but I do think I have done more for Roger’s happiness than Jessie ever will or can do.’

‘Time will show, my dear,’ was the reply.

‘But,’ I said,—‘please don’t think me conceited—I have more sense than Jessie, and I certainly know more of the world, and how to manage; and I believe, too, that I have more fixed principles.’

‘Excellent qualities, Ursie, my dear, for a sister; but I suppose a man like Roger wants something else in a wife.’

‘He wants a pretty face,’ I exclaimed, ‘and a winning manner.’

‘Not so much the face as the manner, my dear. Roger is so strong in himself, that he doesn’t want any one to make him stronger.’

‘And I am too strong for him,’ I replied.

‘Perhaps so, my dear. You see you can stand alone, and act

for yourself, and form your own opinions, and you have a way of putting them out strongly; and these are very good and useful qualities in a sister, or a friend, but they don't suit all men in a wife, especially not a strong man like Roger, with such a tender heart. What he wants is something to pet.'

It was very true. Roger's tender-heartedness had been his snare.

'Well!' I said, 'the deed is done, or all but done: the only thing now is to make the best of it, and I don't think that will be by following Roger's plan, and having two mistresses.'

'Certainly not, Ursie; at least so far as I have had any experience. As the farmer says, whatever you do in life, my dear, take care that you plant your foot upon ground which has a sure foundation; if you don't, before long you will find yourself standing above an earthquake; and there is no sensation more unpleasant, as I have been told.'

'But how to manage it?' I said. 'Roger won't hear of it,—he is almost angry when last I talked to him. I don't think it will do to insist upon it.'

'You can act upon it, my dear, and that will be better than insisting. To insist upon having your own way, seems to me, most times, like giving a man a blow in the face,—he returns it as a matter of course.'

'I don't quite understand you,' I said.

'It is just this, my dear. If you go to Roger and Jessie, and say that you insist upon Jessie's taking her place as mistress, whether she likes it or not, they will very probably turn round upon you, and think you are in a pet, and they may even complain, and say that it is hard to put upon Jessie duties for which she is not prepared.'

'Not prepared?' I exclaimed. 'How has she a right to marry if she is not prepared to undertake every duty which her position requires of her?'

'Women do a great many things which they have no right to do, my dear,' replied Mrs Kemp, quietly. 'We must take them as they are. Many girls, cleverer than Jessie, go on groping through life, and never discover their duties, except by knocking their heads against them.'

'Well!' was my only answer; for I felt cross and disheartened.

'And you see, my dear,' continued Mrs Kemp, 'that would be a bad beginning for you all, to quarrel at the outset.'

'Then I am to give in,' I said.

'Not at all. Only don't raise the question. Take your own view of your position, and act upon it. A person with a fixed purpose has always the advantage over one who trusts to circumstances to work out life.'

'It is very droll,' I exclaimed, and I could not help laughing a little, 'to sit here and talk over with you how to make myself second, when most people would think that my chief wish must be to be first.'

'Ah! Ursie, you love truth better than power, and that's why I love you,' replied Mrs Kemp.

'Yes,' I said, earnestly; 'truth is the one thing I love first, and chiefest, and dearest of all things; let me only have that, and I am satisfied.'

'Well, then, the truth of things now is, or will be, that Roger owns Sandcombe, and that Jessie Lee will be his wife; and, in spite of all they may say to the contrary in their good-nature, that is the position they are to hold.'

'And the position they would wish to hold,' I replied; 'at least I speak of Jessie. I am quite certain that if I were to put myself in any way above her, she would be up in arms before long.'

'To be sure. A girl may be very gentle and humble in her ways of thinking before she is married; but let her once be called Mrs, and notions of her own position come as a matter of course; and if she is weak in herself, she is likely to lay an unwise stress upon them. Not but what, as I said before, Jessie may turn out much better in that way, and in others, too, than you and I are inclined to think. We must not be hard upon her.'

'I don't wish to be hard,' I replied; 'but we can't help seeing things, and I had rather not put myself in the way of wounding Jessie upon such a point.'

'Right enough. But, I think, my dear, it will all be tolerably easy, if you go to work carefully. If I were you, I should not make the least fuss about the matter; I should not, for instance, go and tell the servants that they were to consider Jessie their mistress; but I should make a point of always speaking of her as such; in fact, I should take it as a matter of course, and I should consult her about everything, and make her sit at the head of the table, not because she is mistress, but because she is a married woman; and so, by degrees, you will put her in her

true place, and please both her and Roger. For they will be pleased, in spite of all they may say to the contrary, and then you will all be where you ought to be, and therefore be comfortable.'

I doubted as to the comfort ; but I was sure Mrs Kemp was right, and, feeling strengthened by her opinion, I turned to other subjects,—first Mrs Weir, and then the preparations for the wedding.

CHAPTER LIII.

I WENT to Hove that day week, shopping with Jessie. Roger drove us in, and then left us to do what we wished in the way of purchases, saying he would be ready for us about half-past five, and we were to meet him at the King's Arms. It was a market day, and Hove was very full. A good many carriages were in the town, besides officers walking about, and the place looked gay. I was not often in Hove, for, as I could not well leave Sandcombe with no one to take my place there, I generally made Mary Kemp do my shopping ; but when I did go, I quite enjoyed it. Even on this day, though I must confess that I did not feel very light-hearted, I could find a good deal of amusement in walking about ; and Jessie was entirely happy. She had to try on her wedding-dress,—a dove coloured silk, to be worn with a white muslin mantilla, trimmed with pink, and a white silk bonnet,—and I really did not wonder at the pleasure she seemed to take in twisting and turning before the glass, for anything prettier I had seldom looked upon. Then the dress-maker was so civil, and made so much of her, and showed her such a number of pretty things, while she held in her hand a five-pound note, Roger's gift that morning, to be spent upon anything which took her fancy ! Older and wiser heads than hers have been placed in the same position, and felt themselves excited and elated. I did not blame her ; only,—if she had not been Roger's intended wife !

We might have had luncheon at a friend's house ; but, thinking we should lose time, we agreed to go to the pastry-cook's ; and, as Jessie was tired, we sat down in the little inner room to eat our veal patties. A glass partition separated us from the

other part of the shop. I sat with my back to it, for I disliked being seen; but Jessie drew her chair so as to be able to look through it, and very amusing remarks she made upon the persons who came in.

‘Did you ever see such a bonnet, Ursie? Just look, if it isn’t exactly like a coal scuttle? It must have been made before the flood. And that little gentleman, with the red hair and the moustache! What a pair they are! I hope they won’t come in here; I don’t think they will. He is talking to such a handsome officer now,—and,—well, I do think that is Mrs Price just come in. I must go and speak to her.’

She started up. I laid my hand upon her arm.

‘Jessie, I won’t have Mrs Price brought here.’

I am afraid my tone was angry. Jessie sat down, and was silent; but she laid down her knife and fork, and gazed through the glass.

‘Do turn away,’ I said, ‘they will see you.’

‘I can’t help it if they do,’ replied Jessie, in a tone of annoyance. ‘If we have luncheon in a public shop, we must take our chance.’

‘They won’t stay long,’ I said; ‘they are only buying sugar-plums for her little nephew; and you know it would be very awkward for me to see Mrs Price, because I have never returned her visit.’

‘She wouldn’t mind that; she is not at all particular,’ said Jessie. ‘She has been so kind to me, Ursie, I can’t give up the acquaintance, so you had better speak to her at once, for you will be obliged to do so before long.’

There was truth in this suggestion, but it did not make me feel more amicably towards Mrs Price to discover that the intimacy which I had so long striven to avoid, might be forced upon me by Jessie’s marriage.

Jessie took my silence, I suppose, for assent and approval, for without saying anything more, she suddenly walked into the outer shop. Mrs Price started; there was no great cordiality in her manner.

‘Jessie, my dear, you here? What a wonder! Where did you come from?’ She looked at the officer, then at Jessie, hesitating, I thought, whether she should introduce them to each other; and Jessie looked also, and seemed to expect it,—but Mrs Price apparently determined against it. She said something to Jessie in an under-tone, which I could not hear, and I

saw Jessie change colour. I suppose it was on account of an allusion to her marriage.

‘You have taken us by surprise,’ I heard Mrs Price say, and Jessie made a low, timid answer. Mrs Price drew her nearer to the inner shop, and away from the rest of the party, and then continued, ‘I have friends here you see, but it is no use to trouble you with introductions. You have taken a different line.’

‘I hoped we should always be friends,’ I heard Jessie say.

‘Oh yes; friends, of course. But a married woman,—it will be quite different:—in short, I am disappointed, Jessie, and you know I have reason to be.’ Mrs Price spoke with the tone and manner of wounded affection. Jessie’s eyes were raised to her with a look of wonder and vexation.

‘I don’t mean to be severe, my dear,’ continued Mrs Price, ‘but really, after the opportunities I have given you,—the advantages you have had,—and knowing as you must know,—but I won’t talk of that. Poor fellow! his fate is a hard one.’

I just heard Jessie say, ‘I did not think he would care,’ and then I walked forward and presented myself before them. Jessie’s countenance expressed relief; Mrs Price’s pride. I spoke as though the meeting was accidental and indifferent, asked after her husband, and made an observation upon the weather, and then begged Jessie to finish her luncheon, for we had still a good deal of shopping to do.

‘Pay for us, will you,’ said Jessie, ‘whilst I eat my patty.’

‘Yes, but I think I left my gloves on the table,’ I said, making an excuse that I might not leave her alone again with Mrs Price; and I went back with her to the inner room. I lingered there, watching till Mrs Price should leave the shop, but she was now engaged with the little spoiled boy, who could not make up his mind what lozenges he liked. I saw there was no hope of being rid of her, and as Jessie’s luncheon was ended we went back again. I had the money ready in my hand, that we might not be detained, and I stood between Mrs Price and Jessie, laid the sum on the counter, and turning round directly, saw Mrs Price slip a note into Jessie’s hand, and heard her say, in a low voice, ‘You will see it has been a hard matter to say good-bye.’

Jessie’s colour was crimson one moment, the next she became perfectly white. She hurried out of the shop without another word. We went across the street to a stationer’s to buy some

paper. Then, whilst I was choosing what I wanted, I observed her take up a book under pretence of looking at it, and slipping the note between the leaves, read it, as I suppose she imagined, unperceived. After that she seemed quite to have recovered herself, and we finished the remainder of our business quickly, and at half-past five met Roger and were driven back again to Sandcombe.

As I sat in the back seat of the chaise, I pondered many things in my mind; most especially how far one could be at liberty to found uncomfortable suspicions upon mere trifles. The result of my deliberations I communicated to Jessie when I followed her that night to her room.

I began at once. 'Jessie, I have something upon my mind. You know I am always outspoken, so you must let me be so now. I don't like Mrs Price, and I don't like what she said to you in the shop to-day. I could not help hearing it.'

'I don't like her as I used to do,' replied Jessie. 'I felt to-day, Ursie, that you were right about her, and that I was wrong.'

'I am glad of that,' I continued. 'She is underhand, and I think she might lead you into mischief if you were to see much of her.'

'I am sure of it, and I don't mean to see much of her,' replied Jessie.

I paused—and thought of the note. 'You don't intend to keep up anything like a correspondence with her, of course, then,' I ventured to say.

'Oh dear, no! We have never written to each other except about little matters of business.'

Surely that was enough to satisfy me—yet I added one caution more.

'I shall be glad when you have learned to like only those whom Roger approves of. He could never like Mrs Price.'

'He told me so, this evening,' she replied. 'Indeed, Ursie, I quite feel with him.'

I could but kiss her, and tell her that if she was guided by her husband, she would go safely and happily through life, and with a lighter heart I went down-stairs to say a few words to Roger.

We discussed the affairs of the day; the purchases and orders, the wedding guests, the household arrangements. Just as we had finished, he said to me, 'I have had such a charming talk with Jessie to-night, Trot. I wish you could have heard it. She

is so simple, just like a child, and yet with such capital good sense. She quite sees all that you and I see in Mrs Price.'

'I think she does,' I replied. 'She said as much to me just now, and I am very glad, Roger, that she can talk out to you about everything.'

'I don't believe she has a thought kept back,' she replied. 'Even about that stupid Lieutenant Macdonald she came out freely, though some girls might have been shy. I don't know why I should call him stupid, though,' he added, laughing, 'as I am sure I never had any cause to be jealous.'

'It was a silly business,' I said, though feeling greatly relieved ; 'Mrs Price was at the bottom of it. She grows worse and worse to me. I can bear with her when she forgets herself, but when she puts on the fine lady, as she did to-day, I have scarcely patience to look at her.'

'She is odious,' he exclaimed. 'Did Jessie look very sweet in her wedding-dress? I want her to let me see her in it before the day.'

'We won't forestall pleasure,' I said ; 'at any rate, Roger, you may be satisfied with having a very pretty wife.'

'And a very good one, Ursie'—and he became suddenly grave. 'I am not quite such a fool as I seem, though when I look at her'—he stopped short, and then added : 'if I did not think that my choice was good in God's sight, I could give her up even now.'

Fears, suspicions, warning ! where could they be after that speech ? I went to bed, and to sleep.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE twelfth of June was as brilliant a day as ever dawned upon this fallen earth. If it is pictured in my memory in shades of darkness, the fault is mine and mine alone. I could scarcely have had more than four hours' sleep the night before. I went to bed very late, and I was up again soon after sunrise. Even now I can recall the soft beauty of the morning mists floating over St Anne's ; the glittering of the dew on the turf, the clear song of the birds, and the fresh scent of the warm air pass-

ing over the down. And I was with Roger at Sandcombe ; the home of my infancy. I was to live with him there for years—for life, if so I willed. The prayer I had often made was granted, but so as to be my trial, not my joy.

We were to be a small party. Mary Kemp and I were to be the bridesmaids, and Mrs Kemp had promised to come over early to help me with the preparations for breakfast. Some of our friends were to meet us at Compton church, and come back with us, and after breakfast Roger and Jessie were to drive into Hove, and take a fly from thence to a small village, a kind of watering place, about ten miles off. Roger meant to take Jessie to London afterwards, but he wished to have a little quiet with her first. So the day was mapped out. There was so much household business to be attended to, that I could not dress myself for the wedding at once, but I put on my common gown, and went down-stairs to help Martha, and look to the poultry and the dairy just as usual. There was nothing to make me feel the change that was coming upon me, except the weight at my heart, and the sight of the chairs put in order against the great, round dining-table in the large parlour. That had been done the night before ; Roger and Jessie had helped to place them, and had passed many jokes as to where every one should sit. Their voices seemed still to linger in the empty room.

About half-past seven I went up to help Jessie, but she was not ready for me, and I strolled out into the garden to gather some flowers for her to put in her dress. Roger was there before me for the same purpose. He greeted me tenderly, so indeed as I can never forget, and we took a turn round the garden together ; but we neither of us seemed to know what to say to each other, and when he had put his flowers together, he said he would take them up to Jessie himself, and he went away and left me.

Then William came out, groping rather than walking, for his eyes were failing him almost entirely. I could not let him be alone, and I joined him. He was afraid that we should be late, and he complained of Jessie's want of punctuality, and said he was sure she would drive Roger frantic, if she went so, and at last he came so fidgety that I was obliged to go in to hasten Jessie. I found her standing before the glass, with her dress on, ready to be fastened. When I gazed upon her, so young, fresh, lovely, and loving, a spring of fondness welled up, as it were, from the depths of my heart, and, as I kissed her, I whispered,

‘O Jessie! you look as though you would make Roger happy, and I am sure he will make you so.’

She turned her soft eyes upon me earnestly. ‘Do you think I can make him happy, Ursie? I am afraid he may have made a mistake.’

I smiled. ‘It is too late to think of that,’ I said; ‘he must take his chance.’

Still she was grave. Instead of moving so that I might dress her, she went on: ‘He thinks better of me than he should Ursie, have you told him all my faults?’

‘He has known you long enough to find them out,’ I answered. ‘At any rate, they must be left for the present. William will be so vexed if we don’t go down.’

‘Mrs Temple would give me a worse character than I give myself,’ persisted Jessie.

I became a little impatient, and answered: ‘Dear Jessie, you have chosen the worst moment possible for such a subject. You should have made your confessions before.’

‘It came over me last night,’ she said. ‘I couldn’t sleep. But, Ursie, I love him dearly. That is the chief thing, isn’t it?’

‘Yes, indeed, it is all he asks now, except confidence.’

‘I told him about Mr Macdonald,’ she said, ‘all I could. I think he understands.’

‘If he doesn’t, you must make him. There is nothing in it to pain him.’

‘Oh, nothing! nothing! It was all folly. I am ready now please dress me. I am so glad you say it is nothing.’

Her face brightened into its usual light-hearted expression. She made me fasten her mantilla with the gold brooch, which was William’s gift; and clasp the hair bracelet, which was mine; and then with a merry step she ran to the head of the stairs, returning to say,—‘Ursie, you are to be my wisdom, Roger declares, and I am to do everything you tell me.’

I was pleased. I don’t think I knew then how little human wisdom can aid in a struggle with the temptations of a sinful heart.

The farmer and Mrs Kemp, Mary, and John Hervey arrived just as Jessie was ready. They came over in the farmer’s double chaise. I was very glad to have them all with me; they took off much of the duty of being in good spirits,—the most trying duty a person can have to perform; and I left William, and the farmer, and John to have their jokes, whilst I went with Mrs

Kemp and Mary to show them how we had arranged for the party after church. Mrs Kemp had brought over some sweet things in the chaise,—jelly and blanc-mange, which she and Mary had made for me. I was quite satisfied with the look of the breakfast when it was laid out. Roger lingered about by himself, for Jessie was gone up-stairs. We are expecting the fly every minute. I longed to be with him, and yet I was afraid. At last I did summon courage, and I went and said, with a little laugh, as I put my hand on his shoulder, ‘Are you very impatient? We can’t have many minutes to wait.’

He turned round to me quickly, and said, ‘People are not impatient, Ursie, when they are quite satisfied.’

There was no room for sympathy, and I moved away.

He was the only man I ever saw who did not look scared on his wedding-day.

We drove to church,—Jessie, Mrs Kemp, Mary, and I in the fly; and Roger, William, the farmer, and John in the chaise. The country people had collected in the churchyard, and many were in the church. Farmer Kemp led Jessie up the aisle, and placed her before the altar by Roger’s side.

It had all been a dream to me till then. Mr Richardson’s voice, as he addressed the congregation, telling them wherefore they were met together,—even ‘to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony,’ was the first sound which awoke me to a sense of reality.

No marvel that Roger was grave. There is but one thing more awful than marriage,—and that is death.

It was but a short service, performed without blunder or hesitation; Jessie’s voice never failed her; and Roger, as he grasped the small hand so lovingly given him, vowed unfalteringly, with all the honest fulness of his heart, to take Jessie for his ‘wedded wife, to have, and to hold, to love, and to cherish, till death.’ The ring was placed upon her finger, the prayer offered for the performance of that solemn covenant, and they were joined together, and no man could put them asunder.

The words which made them one were the same which, in the secrecy of my heart, I knew must make Roger and myself *two*.

It was a bitter consciousness, but it was to be put away from me now for ever. I trust and believe there was no trace of it in the kiss which I gave Jessie when Roger brought her up to me and said, ‘She is your sister.’ I know I resolved that, through God’s help, there should be none thenceforth, in

thought, or word, or deed. A considerable bustle and confusion took place when we left the church. Our friends, who were to be at the breakfast, came up to offer their congratulations, and when Roger and Jessie went off in the fly, arrangements were to be made to carry back Mary Kemp and me, as there was only one vacant place for Mrs Kemp in the chaise. I wished, and had settled to walk, but no one would hear of it, and at last Mr Richardson insisted upon it that we should have his little pony-chaise, and John Hervey offered to drive us. I don't know quite how it was, but just as we were setting off, the farmer called out to Mary that there was a place for her now in the chaise; and as we had all been running to and fro like hunted sheep, Mary jumped in, and John Hervey and I were left behind. I was sorry for the moment, but I did not care much about it. I did not care for anything, indeed, except silence, and that I knew John Hervey would understand. I don't think we spoke half a dozen words all the way home; but when he helped me out of the chaise, he said, 'Marriages are trying things, Ursie; one doesn't know whether one's foot is on land or water.'

'I know where mine is,' I said, hastily; 'on water.' He grasped hold of my hand kindly, and I could almost have said there were tears in his eyes.

'It is very wrong in me,' I exclaimed, 'I ought not to have said it, but you will forget it.'

'If I can. But things often turn out better, Ursie, than we expect.'

'And if they turn out worse, there is no use in dwelling upon them,' I said. 'Now, Mr Hervey, we are going to be very merry.' And I ran away from him, went up-stairs, set myself in order,—by a short prayer and a deluge of cold water to my face,—and then re-appeared, to be the cheerful, attentive, happy hostess of the party at Roger's wedding-breakfast.

Nothing can be more same than weddings. I have already described William and Leah's; and there was an oppressive phantom-like feeling of repetition in all that went on on the occasion of Roger's marriage. Healths were drunk and speeches made; and many of the persons present were those who had congratulated Leah Morris on the pleasant prospects before her when she became the mistress of Sandcombe. If it had not been for a glance at poor William's helpless movements, and the sight of Jessie's pretty little face, turned so sweetly upon Roger, and

smiling and blushing with surprise whenever she was addressed as Mrs Grant, I could almost have believed that Time had flowed backwards. Almost, not quite; when I had leisure to think of myself, the weight at my heart told me what a burden of experience and thought Time had brought, as it had borne me onwards.

Roger and Jessie did not leave us till late in the afternoon; that helped the day very much. Roger's thoughtfulness was greater than I can describe. He seemed to understand exactly all the little things which might trouble me when I was left alone to manage everything for every one by myself; and he and John Hervey made arrangements about the wine for the evening, and the supper for the men who were attending to the horses, and settled, in fact, a number of things which would never have entered my head, but which would have perplexed me if they had taken me unawares. For the time I seemed to be more in Roger's thoughts than Jessie, who was finishing the packing, with Mary Kemp to help her. He was so like what he ever had been, I could not think why I felt any difference, till some one came up to him laughing, and said, 'Mr Grant, your wife wants you.' The smile that stole over his face then made me walk away and mix with the guests, fidget about Jessie, and keep myself in a continual bustle till the fly drove up to the door, the luggage was put in, and—they were gone. How I talked and laughed that evening, and did everything, indeed, like everybody else, except eat and drink, I cannot imagine, now that I look back; but I know that I was told it was delightful to see me enjoy myself, and I believe there might even have been something like enjoyment in the excitement of feeling which forced me to exert myself. But the reaction came. When the wedding-guests were gone—when Farmer Kemp had given me his parting salute on both cheeks, and Mrs Kemp and Mary had said their affectionate good-bye, and John Hervey had offered me a quiet shake of the hand, which did not want words, and I was left alone with William, and his irritable fatigue, and the burnt-up candles, and the empty glasses, and the disarranged chairs—who shall wonder that I stole up to my room and cried bitterly?

CHAPTER LV.

FOR three weeks longer I was to be the undisturbed mistress of Sandcombe. The days were sufficiently occupied in preparing for the time when my authority was to be shared, if not entirely surrendered. I cannot say that the prospect was pleasant, little as I fancied I loved power. According to the old proverb, 'The value of anything is never known till it is lost;' and I had not till this time been aware how much my comfort had been increased, latterly, by having no one to dispute my will in little domestic matters. Mrs Kemp's advice I knew to be wise, but it was not easy to bring myself to act upon it. I could have resigned my office at once formally, and found some satisfaction in the sense of freedom which would follow. But to have all the labour and responsibility, and compel another to take the dignity of power, was trying to human nature, and especially such a nature as mine—hasty and resolute, able to undertake great works, or practise great self-denials, but fretting against petty restraints, and peculiarly irritated by the difficulties involved in the untruthfulness of a false position. Happily, however, I had no leisure to forestall evils. Between William, and the farm, and the kitchen, I was incessantly occupied, and had only time to go over to Stonecliff once, to inquire for Mrs Weir. The visit was unsatisfactory. Mrs Temple made many complaints of the new attendant, and seemed to think that I was answerable for her faults, because I had first mentioned her name. She did not allow me to see Mrs Weir alone, and before I departed hinted that great changes might soon be expected. 'Mr Temple thought of letting Stonecliff for a time; perhaps they might remove from it altogether. Of course, wherever they went Mrs Weir would go also. She could not live without them.' I made no observation at the time, but when I returned home, without asking advice of any one, I wrote a letter to Miss Milicent. It was a strong measure to take, but I felt it to be necessary. For Mrs Weir to be dragged about wherever Mrs Temple chose to carry her, and with no one to be a check upon her, seemed to be not only cruel but dangerous in the poor lady's present state. If anything could bring Miss Milicent to see her duties in a straightforward way, I thought it might be such a plan as this.

I was waiting for the answer to the letter when the day arrived

on which Roger and Jessie were expected home. We had sent the chaise into Hove for them, and they were to be with us about six o'clock, in time for tea, which was put ready for them in the little parlour. I had gathered some flowers to make the room look fresh and pretty, and made some tea-cakes which I knew Jessie was particularly fond of. I pleased myself with thinking that Roger would like these little attentions, and as I waited at the garden gate, looking up the lane by which they would come, I almost believed that I was anticipating the meeting with pleasure. It was a glorious evening, warm and yet fresh, the very feeling of life was enjoyment; and even William, who came in about this time from the farm, and joined me, seemed to regain his spirits under its influence. He leaned over the gate, straining his poor dim eyes, and fancying he saw, and being almost certain he heard them coming, whilst he talked to me of the comfort of having Roger with us, and praised Jessie for her thoughtfulness in having written often; and it did me good to hear him. His was a much more thankful, contented mind than it used to be.

'There they are, I am sure those are the wheels now, Ursie,' he exclaimed. 'They are at the top of the lane;—hark! don't you hear?'

No, I heard nothing but the noises of the men with the cows and horses in the farm-yard. But William's ear was sharper than mine. He was right. A turn in the lane had hid them from us; but in a few seconds the chaise was seen, coming slowly down the hill. William threw open the gate and went out.

'Hollo! stop! what are you going round there for?'

Roger was driving the chaise into the yard, but he drew up, and jumped out, and before speaking to us turned round to help Jessie.

'Well! my good fellow! welcome home again. And, Jessie, I may have a kiss now,' and William seized Roger's hand, whilst he kissed Jessie, and then shook both their hands again, scarcely able to express his delight.

'Trot! my little Trot!' Roger disengaged himself from William, and gave me a *bear's hug*, and then stood aside whilst I welcomed Jessie. 'How are you, dear Jessie? Are you very tired? Have you had a long journey? You must want your tea. It is quite ready for you.' The words were cold to my own ears, I hope they were not so to hers. We went in at the garden

gate. Jessie put her arm within Roger's, and went first, William and I walked behind.

'She is a little tired,' said Roger, turning round to me as we went in-doors. 'We had such a day of business and sight-seeing yesterday, but we were determined to see everything. To-night she must go to bed early, and have a good rest.'

'As early as she likes,' I said, 'only we will give her some tea first. I am afraid, Jessie, you won't find everything quite comfortable in your own room. I thought the new chest of drawers would have been sent to-day, but that stupid Thompson at Hove has disappointed me.'

'Never mind, we don't care for chests of drawers, do we, love?' said Roger. 'Home is the thing. Run up-stairs and take off your things, and then come down to tea. And, Ursie, if you will just not let her unpack her boxes to-night. What are you burdening yourself with that for?' he added, as Jessie took a large brown paper parcel in her hand; 'all you will want now will be the small carpet-bag.' Jessie said there was something particular in the parcel, she must have it, and Roger then took it from her, and went up-stairs with it. He had left the carpet-bag, and as it was small I carried it up myself.

'If you will rest it here, Ursie,' said Roger, pointing to a chair, but not offering to lift the bag, 'I can unlock it, for I have the keys. I wouldn't trust her with them,' he added, laughing.

'How pretty the flowers are,' said Jessie; 'and how pleasant and bright the room looks, Ursie; you must have taken a great deal of trouble about it.'

Roger gave me a kindly smile. 'She is a good, little Trot,' he said. 'The flowers are not quite so grand, Jessie, as those we saw in London, are they? Such a sight, Ursie, in Covent Garden! I took Jessie there quite early; but she will tell you all about it, all we have seen and done. A capital traveller she makes, and she remembers everything.'

'Ursie, dear, you look tired,' said Jessie, when Roger went away; 'I am afraid you have been working too hard for us.'

I did feel very tired, but I evaded an answer. I don't think I felt inclined for pity, and I went down-stairs.

'The place of honour for you, Jessie,' said William, as he drew out an arm-chair for her, when she entered the room; Jessie placed herself in it at once. 'She does not look much the worse for her fatigue, does she?' said Roger, gazing at her with

a satisfaction which he did not endeavour to conceal. 'That gown is the one Mrs Kemp gave you, love, is it not? You must tell her how useful it has been;' and he stretched out his hand and smoothed down the frills,—an action which I could find no fault with, but which gave me a most uncomfortable sensation.

'By the by, I have some news to tell you about Mary Kemp,' said Jessie; 'we heard it in the waiting-room to-day, just as we were starting.'

'About John Hervey, rather,' said Roger; 'that old uncle of his is dead at last, and has left him five thousand pounds, to say the least.'

'Of course he will make up to Mary Kemp at once,' said Jessie.

'I am not so sure of that,' I replied. 'They go on very oddly, and I know they are not engaged, for Mrs Kemp told me so herself. She only thinks they like each other.'

'And you have never said anything to Mary,' asked Jessie.

'No; how could I? If she was not engaged, how could I ask her whether she cared for him?'

'I should have found it out somehow,' said Jessie. 'I always thought there was a regular engagement.'

'Women can't understand waiting and fearing,' said Roger; and he laughed.

'It is the fact of there being no engagement which puzzles me,' I said. 'Mary is the last person to let a man dangle on, paying her attentions, without coming to any conclusion. She has no vanity in her.'

'That is saying more than I would say for any woman,' observed William.

'I don't know that women are more vain than men,' said Roger; 'and if they are, they have more cause to be, haven't they, Jessie?'

Jessie laughed, and blushed, and gave no direct answer, merely remarking that Mary Kemp was better than most people.

'I think you must know more about the affair between her and Mr Hervey than any one else,' I said, addressing her; 'for I remember it was you who set the rumour afloat, and I have all along half credited it, because you told me it was so.'

'Mrs Price, not I,' said Jessie. 'She is given to gossip, and she always declared they would marry.'

'Time will show if we wait long enough,' observed Roger,

'and in the mean season, we will give them both our best wishes. Jessie, love, you are not eating anything. Have some more tea-cake ; this is just the kind you like.'

Jessie helped herself to a small piece, but Roger insisted upon her taking what was left, which was little enough. William and he never touched such things, he said, and as I had made the cakes, I was likely to have had enough of them, so the chief duty devolved upon her.

My face was nearly hidden by the urn. Jessie peeped round it and said, 'He is very unfair upon you, Ursie. I don't at all see why, having made the cakes to please me, which I am sure you did, you are not to enjoy them ; do have some.'

I shook my head, and murmured something ; but I did not venture to do more, and making an excuse to fetch some sugar, I left the room. Turning into the large parlour, I put down the candle upon the table, closed the door, and walked up and down the room.

To be vexed about such trifles ! to care for Roger's not offering me a piece of cake, or letting me carry a carpet-bag, or omitting to notice my flowers. I could not have believed it was in me. And to be irritated with Jessie, and her little kind thoughtfulness ;—it was actually mean. Did I indeed so dearly love power, that I could not submit to common civility from her, because I had hitherto considered it my place to show rather than to receive attention ? But it was not power that I cared for ; I felt sure it was not. If Roger had only recognised that I had worked for him ; if he had only said that he knew I had done all to please him, I hoped I should have been satisfied. But he was engrossed with his one object, and what could I expect ? Jessie's thanks and attentions were galling, because he was silent.

I could not comfort myself ; I could not even set myself right by owning that I was quite wrong. The feelings were so mixed. They were selfish and unjust, and yet not without cause. I waited for a few minutes, just sufficient to recover my composure, and then with a hard feeling of endurance, under which lay a quick irritability, ready to spring forth at the least provocation, I returned to my place at the tea-table. I had not been missed. Roger was giving an account of his London experiences, and calling upon Jessie to corroborate them ; and she was adding little comments and anecdotes, which helped to amuse William, and made our evening brighter than it had been since she left

us. They talked fast and merrily, and seemed satisfied with my attention, as I now and then added a word, whilst I helped the servant to carry away the tea-things, and then went to look after some other household matters.

It must have been merely a fancy of Roger's, that Jessie was tired. She chatted on as though she had only just risen from a good night's rest, and moved about quite briskly. A little while before prayers, for instance, Roger was telling us something about an exhibition they had seen, and wishing he had a book that he had bought, which described it ; he said he was too lazy to go and search for it.

Jessie started up in a moment. 'I will go ; let me go, Roger. I know just where it is.'

He smiled kindly upon her. 'No, love, I can't let you trouble yourself ; we will look at it to-morrow.'

'Let me go,' I said ; 'where shall I find it ?'

'I can't describe where, exactly,' said Jessie ; 'though I can guess, for I packed all his things myself. I suspect it is hidden with some other treasures, between your second-best coat and your wedding waistcoat, Roger,' she added, laughing, as against his orders, she ran up-stairs.

I sat down again, wondering at the change which had come over the world, and which had transformed the shy, respectful Jessie Lee, scarcely able to look upon Mr Roger without awe, into the attentive, but free and merry little wife. She came down again, bringing with her the book, and also a note, which Martha had just given her for Roger from Mr Stewart of Hatton.

'What is there in it ?' she said, and she peeped over his shoulder.

He smiled and held it for her to read. 'Nothing of consequence, you see. I will go over some day soon.' He put the letter in his pocket, and went on talking about the exhibition.

If I felt chilled and jarred, perhaps I may be excused, when it is remembered that hitherto I had been the petted and privileged person to whom Roger turned on every occasion, and that now I could not consider myself at liberty to go to his room, or inquire the contents of a note, without something like an apology.

Yet Jessie was right in all she did ; that was the greatest grievance of all, for if so, surely I must be wrong.

The first week of Jessie's return was unsettled. She had her

things to unpack, and Roger was coming to her upon one excuse or another every hour, taking her with him to see this, or give an opinion upon that. He did not put me aside, but he was continually *remembering* me, and this must always be painful to one who has been accustomed to be *thought* of. We had a good many visitors, and wine was handed round, and wedding-cake eaten; and Jessie looked very pretty, and behaved very pleasantly. She seemed quite in her fit place, as she sat up in her best silk dress to receive the congratulations, and I felt myself in mine as I waited upon every one. If I could only keep her a doll, and work for her, my task would be easy. But Mrs Kemp's admonitions sounded in my ears, and as many days went by, and the excitement of the return went off, I felt that we must all face our new positions, and follow out life accordingly.

And how to begin? I made my first effort on a baking-day. We were very busy as usual, but I heard something about a drive for Jessie in the afternoon, and I knew that she was upstairs doing something to her dress in preparation for it.

I sent Esther Smithson to her, to ask if she would be home late, and whether Jane, our little school-girl, was to be kept to help clean up the kitchen.

Esther brought me back word, that if I would just settle the matter, Mrs Grant would be obliged. It was uncertain how late she should be.

Upon this, I went up to Jessie, and found her at her work, and, as it happened, Roger with her. He had come in from the farm only a few minutes before.

'What do you want, Trot?' he said, cheerfully, as I entered the room. 'She is a bird of ill omen, Jessie, isn't she? always full of business.'

'Mine is an easy business, for once in a way,' I said. 'I only want to make Jessie say what she wishes.'

'Anything that you wish, Ursie, I am sure,' said Jessie. 'You know a great deal better than I do. Do you think, Roger, we shall have time to go round by Stonecliff, if we set off at half-past three?'

'We will try,' he said; 'I know you have set your heart upon going to Mrs Weir.'

'If you do go that way,' I said, 'you might just stop and see little Jane's mother, and talk to her about the child's coming earlier in the mornings.'

'If we pass the cottage, we can,' answered Jessie; 'but I am not sure that we shall go that road.'

'What is little Trot thinking of?' said Roger, patting me on the shoulder, and noticing, as I suppose, my grave face.

'Only,' I said, lightly, 'that if Mrs Grant does not give her own orders, people won't understand that they are bound to obey them.'

'Mrs Grant has such an excellent substitute,' said Jessie, laughing. 'She does not want to give orders. Why, Ursie, you know twenty times more about housekeeping than I do.'

'Then isn't it time you should learn?' I said.

'She will learn from you,' said Roger, quickly; 'she can't have a better teacher. You know I told you, Ursie, that no one wanted to turn you out of your place.'

'But I may want to vacate it,' I said, and then observing that Roger and Jessie both looked rather uncomfortable, I added, 'At any rate, I don't like to fill it entirely by myself; so, Jessie dear, do tell me how long you think you shall be out this afternoon, and whether you would wish us to keep Jane.'

'I suppose she may as well stay,' said Jessie, 'if you think it necessary.'

'There is a good deal to do,' I said, 'because of the baking.'

'Oh! yes, I forgot. How stupid of me; I ought not to have fixed my drive for to-day! But now it is all arranged. I suppose it does not very much signify.'

'Not much. Will you remember to tell Jane's mother what you have to complain of?'

'If I don't forget, I will, certainly; and, Ursie, will you and William try to settle a day for a party? People are asking me out so, I must have them here in return, mustn't I, Roger?'

He smiled an assent, and Jessie, who had left her work to talk to me, went on with it diligently.

Roger followed me as I went away. 'You are vexed, Ursie, about something, what is it?'

'Nothing, nothing,' was my answer.

'Nothing has no meaning; I must know.'

'Nothing that you can remedy; or at least that you will remedy,' I said.

'Then you think me very much altered. I always have wished to remedy what you found fault with.'

'Not altered, Roger. Oh no! it was what I ought to have known;' but I felt myself becoming mysterious, and knew that

would make me irritating, so I burst through all reserve and prudence, and added, 'I am afraid you are going the way to spoil Jessie.' For almost the first time in his life I saw him look proud and hurt.

'That is a grave charge,' he said. I don't quite perceive what reason you have to make it.'

'If you make a doll of her,' I said, 'you must spoil her.'

'Making a doll of her, I suppose, means making her useless. She is scarcely that, for she is always busy.'

'Yes, with her own concerns, and I don't mean to say that she does not help me when I ask her.'

'And when you don't ask her,' he said. 'She has taken upon herself entirely the duty of waiting upon William.'

'Because she likes reading aloud,' was on my lips; but I would not say it, for it would have annoyed him, so I answered, 'People speak of her as the mistress of Sandcombe, and therefore it is right that she should attend to the duties.'

He misunderstood me completely, my ill-concealed irritation misled him as to my feelings, and he replied, 'Nobody wishes to take power from you, Ursie; Jessie least of all.'

'Of course, of course not,—I don't think of such a thing;—Roger, why can't you understand?'

'Because you create difficulties where there are none,' he replied; 'Jessie is willing to make a slave of herself, if it is needed. She will work herself to death if I will let her. All she wants is just to be told what to do; and, Ursie, I have quite depended upon you for that.'

Quite right—quite true! but there was a falsity at the bottom, and I could not make him see it. Jessie went for her drive, saw Mrs Weir, called upon little Jane's mother, came home and told me of it, as if she had done a meritorious deed,—then helped me in the kitchen, read to William; and because I asked her to do it, hemmed table-cloths after tea, and went to bed thinking, I am sure, that she had done me a favour, and sacrificed herself to assist me in my duties.

CHAPTER LVI.

MY letter from Miss Milicent came, though not till after considerable delay. I opened it anxiously, prepared to be provoked if it were only by Miss Milicent's scrawling letters upon the thin foreign paper.

'DEAR URSIE GRANT,

'I received your letter a fortnight ago. I should have answered it before if I had known what to say. Matilda Temple is doing just what I thought she would ; I can't think why my mother submits.

'If you were to tell her that you think it bad for my mother to go away, perhaps she would be frightened and stay where she is, for she does not like you, and thinks you speak your mind. As to my coming home, I should do no good if I were there, for my mother never listens to me, and Matilda Temple and I can't help quarrelling. My father and I are going into Normandy soon, he has some business there. If I come home at all, it must be to get some money, for no one sends me any. I am sorry your brother Roger has married Jessie Lee. I thought he was a wiser man. I never had a sister-in-law, so I don't know how I should like one. I am glad you have taken to seeing my mother oftener. She likes you better than most people, and you understand her whimsies. I should like to hear about the school-children at Compton. This is a strange place, the people's ways are so odd. As I don't go to their churches, I feel very like a heathen.

'My father is out a good deal, and I only know a few persons, but it will be pleasant enough going into Normandy. I wish, if you hear of any one coming to France, you would send me a pair of stout boots, such as the shoemaker at Hatton used to make for me. I can't get such here. Paris is a very flimsy place. I have great trust in you, Ursie Grant, and am sure that you will manage best in keeping my mother near you.

'I am glad you wrote to me, for I don't often hear any Compton news.

'Your sincere friend,
'MILICENT WEIR'

Did all the world do their duty by deputy? That was almost

my first thought when I had finished Miss Millicent's letter. Such a quiet way of setting a claim aside, and letting it fall upon another, was so startling that, really, it was enough to make me think I was under a mistake—and that Miss Millicent was not bound to come home and take care of her mother, but might rightly leave all to me.

Persons who have a clear eye to their duties lay themselves open, I have observed, to much more blame from the world than those who turn away and don't appear to see them. The standard we set up for ourselves is that which, for the most part, people expect us to follow. As, for instance, when a man is indolent, or extravagant, or selfish, it is commonly said, 'Oh, yes! but what can you expect from such a man?' As if the faults which he permitted to himself were his excuse. I found this even with regard to Miss Millicent. I believe Mrs Kemp and myself were almost the only persons who had not learned to say, 'Well, she is so odd and so wilful, that it does not much signify. She must go her own way, for she will never go any other person's.' And I know I was thought uncharitable, when I saw that the fact of her not being able to be of use to her mother was a fault, and could never be an excuse for remaining away. In this free country of England, we are, upon the whole, willing to let every one be what he chooses, so long as he gives notice of it, that others may not come in his way. But England is not heaven, and we English people are not angels, and I suppose the judgment of the angels in heaven may be somewhat different from ours. I was wrong, though, in saying that Mrs Kemp and myself were the only persons, there was one other—John Hervey; and I had an opportunity of talking to him upon the matter soon after receiving Miss Millicent's letter. He was less at Sandcombe than he used to be, and when he did come we said but little to each other. Though I felt he understood my disappointment about Roger, I could not talk of it, and he was just so intimate that there was no choice between keeping on the surface of all things, or going deep into them. Mrs Weir, however, was neutral ground, and I was pleased to have his sympathy, and pleased, too, to hear a little about the money that had been left him, and to sound him about Mary Kemp. His feeling for her was a real perplexity to me. Like her I was sure he did, and she liked him. They were excellent friends and cousins, and quite at home with each other. Only too much so, I thought, for anything more serious. The world,

however, had so long set it down that they were to be married, it was difficult to rid one's self of the impression. The time when I had the longest talk with him was one day when he came over to dine, and was to ride into Hove with Roger afterwards. I saw him by myself before dinner, and showed him Miss Milicent's letter, about which he felt as I did, and said that I ought not to give in so easily, but should make another effort to put her duty plainly before her. Mrs Weir would no doubt be pleased to have her home again, and this new plan of Mrs Temple's was just the opportunity for breaking up the joint-household, and settling Mrs Weir again in a home of her own. I asked him whether Miss Milicent was at all necessary to her father, but he said that from all he could learn she did more harm than good to Mr Weir, for she encouraged his schemes, which were fast leading him into difficulties abroad, as they had done in England; and having her with him was an excuse for living in an expensive part of the town, and seeing more company than he ought. Moreover, he was always falling back upon his daughter's money, and making her write urgent letters for remittances, to which he could have no right except on her account, and which prevented Mrs Weir from putting by anything to pay his old debts as she much wished to do.

'Altogether, Ursie,' concluded Mr Hervey, 'the case is not such a perplexing one as people choose to think; and though it would startle folks to hear me say it, I believe it would be settled more justly in God's sight by a calculation of pounds, shillings, and pence, than by any talk about right and wrong, and conflicting claims, which are only determined by every one's own fancy.'

'People don't like pounds, shillings, and pence,' I said; 'it is such a mean way of arranging things.'

'Very true,' he replied. 'But, Ursie, isn't it mean because we choose to make it so? After all, there must be some great use and intention in a thing which has such an enormous influence in the world as money; it can't be only a snare. And sometimes when I think—which you know,' he added, laughing, 'I only do now and then for a change,—but when I do think, it seems to me that money is the representative of many chief virtues,—justice, and generosity, and self-denial,—and that if a man could, through God's help, keep himself quite straight with regard to it, he would travel fast and far on the road to perfection; whilst a fault with regard to it seems to me, in like

manner, to be no trifle, but a deep, fundamental flaw at the root of a person's character, which there are ten chances to one will in the end lead him quite astray.'

He was right, I felt, and I could have talked more to him, only dinner was ready. I gained a new notion of him from that conversation, more like what I used to have of Roger. He was not apt to come out with thoughts, though he was very quick, and shrewd, and infinitely good-natured. One thing I forgot to mention, he told me that Mrs Temple was actually making inquiries for a tenant to take the remainder of her lease at Stonecliff. That threatened a speedier removal than I had calculated upon, and it worried me not a little.

Jessie, that day, was full of her party : she called it hers and talked of 'what I wish,' 'what shall I do,' quite naturally. Roger laughed at her a little, and reminded her that they must both ask Mrs Housekeeper's permission, meaning mine ; and then she would turn round to me very pleasantly, and ask me what I thought about things, which if I objected to would, I knew, be carried against me by the mere power of her pretty entreaties. Still I did object sometimes, because I considered it right ; but I don't feel at all sure that I did it as I ought to have done, or without showing annoyance. The great question was whether it should be only a common tea-party and supper, or whether we should try to get up a dance. I preferred the tea-party ; it was more what we had been used to. I thought, at first, we should not have enough for a dance. Besides, I had a dread of beginning that kind of thing for Jessie ; her head was so easily turned ; and if we set the example, others would be sure to follow it, and then there would be constant going out, and the regular farm life would be quite interrupted. What I wished was to ask a few neighbours at a time to drink tea, or even to dine, if we liked it, and entertain them in the old-fashioned way ; perhaps with a rubber of whist, if they were elderly people, or with forfeits and games if they were young. I should not have cared either if we had chosen to send for a fiddler, and dance just amongst ourselves when the evening came, but the thing I disapproved of was the notion of giving a large dancing party ; and this I saw was what William and Roger both disliked also in their hearts, only to humour Jessie, they would not openly object.

John Hervey quizzed her, declaring that she wished to show off like Mrs Price ; and asking her how she would send out her

invitations ; whether she meant to be 'at home' on such an evening, as he had heard the great London people were. She bore his bantering extremely well, and seemed rather to enjoy it than otherwise. I wished I could enjoy it too, but things were too serious underneath all this joking. I felt they so little knew, any of them, the mischief they were doing her ; Roger would have seen it if he had looked upon her as a responsible person, with serious duties to attend to, and he would then have objected strongly to all the fuss, and trouble, and upsetting of our ordinary life. But I was the manager and mistress, and the farm would, he knew, go on just as well whether Jessie went out and gave parties, or stayed at home quietly. His trust in me was unbounded, and the more he trusted the more he was induced to indulge his wife.

I carried my point so far that Roger at last took my side in saying he should not like to ask people to a regular dance, and William supported us ; but when we began to talk over the guests to be invited the numbers mounted up so fast, that I felt tolerably certain how the affair would end. Jessie, I was sure, was longing to ask Mrs Price. She gave several hints about it, but Roger did not take them, and I pretended not to understand them, for I thought it better to talk the matter over with her when we were by ourselves, and when I might be able to show her quietly the unsuitness of such a proposal, which as likely as not might give Mrs Price offence. We were lingering over the dinner, talking, and I was beginning to feel a little impatient, having a good deal of work before me for the afternoon, when Esther Smithson came running into the room, in a great hurry, to tell us that there was a horse coming down the lane at such a pace, she thought it must be running away, the gentleman did not seem able to stop it. One of the parlour windows looked towards the lane, and we all hurried to it, and saw, as Esther had described, a horse at full gallop coming up to the farm-yard gate.

'He will be thrown,' said Jessie in a frightened tone.

'The gate had better be opened, Roger,' said William, but before he had spoken, Roger had gone out. He was not in time, however ; the horse came to a sudden and violent stop, and the shock threw the rider upon the ground, with his head against the gate. We were naturally very much alarmed, and all except William ran out directly. But before we reached the spot we heard the farm men saying there were no bones

broken, the gentleman was only bruised, and we soon saw him sitting on the bank, holding his head with both hands, but otherwise apparently not much hurt. I knew him directly—it was Mr Macdonald; and Jessie knew him too, and kept, as I observed, a little in the background. He did not seem to remark any of us particularly, but thanked us generally for our anxiety, and said he would mount his horse again and ride back to Dene. It was a stupid business, the animal had taken fright at a wheel-barrow.

I earnestly hoped that Mr Macdonald would do as he proposed, but Roger, I suppose, thought it inhospitable, and pressed him to come in and have a glass of wine.

‘Not wine, I hope,’ was my whisper to John Hervey as we stood apart: ‘do let him go; Roger knows nothing about him.’

John smiled, and putting himself forward, said: ‘With such a bruise as Mr Macdonald has, the kindest offering would be ointment and bandages. I don’t know whether there are such things at Sandcombe.’

‘At any rate, rest won’t hurt any one after such a fall,’ said Roger, rather in a persisting tone. ‘Jessie, will you just go in, and tell William that Mr Macdonald is coming.’

John Hervey and I cast despairing glances at each other; he seemed amused, so was not I. Mr Macdonald rose from his seat on the bank directly he heard Jessie’s name, and going up to her, shook hands, and said he had not known her, he hoped she would excuse it, but his head was in such a state of confusion; and he put his hand up as though he was in pain.

Jessie curtsied and looked very awkward,—and urged nothing about his going into the house, till Roger mentioned it again; and then both she and I were obliged to say something, merely that we might not appear inhospitable. But I confess I did it with a bad grace; and when Jessie went on before, I walked behind with Mr Hervey, and left Roger to entertain our new guest.

He made himself agreeable enough in the house, perhaps the fall had cleared his head; and when I could get over my innate dislike to him, I was obliged to own that Jessie was not so absolutely to be condemned for having liked him. Roger, after a while, went off with John Hervey, and told Jessie to do the honours; so she took her work and sat down in the parlour,—and I did the same, though it was very inconvenient to me. Mr Macdonald must have stayed nearly an hour, talking all the

time, though still complaining of his head. A good deal passed between him and Jessie about people whom I only knew by name, but it was all in a light way ; though I thought I could perceive something like pique in his tone, and Jessie was nervous and short in her answers. If I had not known how affairs had once stood between them, I should not have noticed anything particular. But I was provoked with Jessie for sending a message to Mrs Price through him, and still more provoked with William for saying, as Mr Macdonald bade him good-bye: 'You have found your way to Sandcombe once, sir, accidentally. I hope the next time you will come on purpose ; we shall always be very glad to see you.' The moment he was gone I could not help expressing what I felt, and saying that I thought a man with Mr Macdonald's known habits was not desirable company ; but William only laughed, and told me that if I was so strait-laced, I must needs shut myself up entirely. And then, I suspect, being a little conscience-stricken, he called to Jessie, and asked her to fetch the newspaper and read to him,—and so the conversation was stopped.

But I was not going to let the matter rest. I went to Roger that same evening, when he came back from Hatton,—not telling him exactly that I wanted to talk to him, for I don't think men like that, they always think something must be going wrong in money matters,—but entering upon the subject accidentally, as it were, as we strolled round the garden. 'Mr Macdonald,' I said, 'stayed a long time, and made himself more agreeable than I expected.'

'Yes,' replied Roger. 'He is a good kind of inoffensive young man. I don't half believe what the world says of him.'

'I was wondering about it myself, this afternoon,' was my reply. 'But I am afraid it is all but too true, and I was sorry on that account that William asked him to come again.'

'Are you?' said Roger, and he thought a little. 'Well! I don't know that I am.'

'He won't suit you,' I said.

'No, not at all,' and Roger laughed. 'But you know, Ursie, when one has done a man an unkindness, without meaning it, one is not sorry to have the opportunity of showing him a civility. I couldn't have pressed him to come to Sandcombe myself, but I am not sorry that William did it.'

'He has no right to think it an unkindness,' I said ; 'you had as much right to fall in love with Jessie as he had.'

‘Unkindness is not perhaps the right word ; but it must make a man feel odd to see the person who has carried off just the very thing which he had wished for. And if, under such circumstances, he can meet one with an open hand and an open heart, why, I think it is to his credit.’

‘The credit of his taste, perhaps,’ I replied ; ‘I don’t know that it says quite so much for his feeling.’

‘You would like a little jealousy,’ he said. ‘I think women always do. But I never was jealous myself, Ursie, and I don’t understand jealousy in others’

‘How can you tell that you are not jealous,’ I said ; ‘you, who were accepted the very first moment you made the offer.’

‘Well ! that is true. But one thing I know, Ursie, that if I had had the slightest notion that Jessie doubted about her feeling for me,—if there had been any other person for whom she had even the inkling of a preference, I would have waited three, six, twelve months, and would at last have given her up entirely, rather than marry with the chance of finding that my wife had made a mistake.’

‘Then you are jealous,’ I said.

‘No, not in the least. It would not have been from jealousy, but the wish to see the woman I loved happy, whether it were with me, or with any other person.’

‘You say more than many would,’ I replied.

‘I say what I believe every honourable man, not eaten up by selfishness, feels, if he does not say it. You may not put faith in me, Ursie, but Jessie did.’

An uncomfortable misgiving came over me. ‘You mean,’ I said, ‘that Jessie assured you she had never cared for any one but you ?’

‘I did not ask her the question. I was not going to search into all the secrets of her little heart in days gone by. I had no right to do so. But I did ask whether at that time she felt herself free to give me a full, undivided affection.’

‘And she answered, yes ?’

‘Of course, heartily, yes. If she had not, we should not now have been man and wife. More than that, of her own accord, afterwards she assured me that the only person who had ever paid her any decided attention was Lieutenant Macdonald, for whom she had never felt anything approaching to real regard. You see, Ursie, it would be too silly now to turn round and be jealous.’

'Too silly, indeed,' I said; but an impression of something disagreeable remained on my mind. I was tempted to say, 'I suppose you know that Mr Macdonald actually proposed to Jessie?' but I was prevented by the dread of interfering in the slightest degree between husband and wife,—a dread first inculcated by Mrs Weir in bygone days, and since deeply impressed upon me by experience. Roger saw that I was not satisfied, but his thoughts took a different direction from mine. He fancied that in some way I did not do justice to Jessie.

'I think, Ursie,' he said, 'that you scarcely understand Jessie. You look upon her as a child still, and seem to wonder that I should treat her as a woman.'

'No, indeed,' I replied; 'I only think that she is young.'

'Not so very much younger than you are; and I am sure no one can behave more discreetly than she does.'

What could I say? It would have been irritating to tell him she had not yet been tried. So I made no reply, and Roger was pained, and thought I was cross; and thus we separated.

The invisible barrier which had lately been growing up between us, was by degrees becoming visible. Jessie took apparently very little interest in Mr Macdonald, and scarcely mentioned his name. I said to her in the evening that it was strange he should have been brought to Sandcombe in that way, for it certainly must have been unpleasant to him; and her reply was, 'Oh, he must have forgotten all that nonsense now.' But as soon as she said the words, she tried to change the subject; and I, being determined to satisfy myself upon one point, continued it.

'I am glad Roger knows about it all,' I said. 'It is so much better not to have secrets from a husband.'

'Oh yes; much better—much'—

'And,' I added, 'they met very pleasantly and cordially, considering that Mr Macdonald was a disappointed man.'

'I don't think he took his disappointment much to heart,' replied Jessie.

'I suppose Roger knows he actually made you an offer?' I said.

'No—yes—no. I told him everything generally.'

The answer did not please me. 'Dear Jessie,' I said, 'you won't mind my telling you that Roger likes to hear things particularly, not generally. It can't make any difference to you or to any one, his knowing this fact; and yet it is just one which he might be annoyed to think was kept from him.'

‘I can’t go back to the old subject,’ said Jessie. ‘I hate it, and, as you say, it won’t make any difference.’

‘I have known Roger longer and more intimately than you have, Jessie,’ I said. ‘I know he has such strict notions of confidence between husband and wife.’

I could not imagine why my words took such effect upon her, but she turned quite pale, and, bursting into tears, said she was sure I did not love her, and that I did not like her marriage. She had felt it from the beginning, my manner had never been cordial, and people had noticed it.

It was the most trying of all accusations,—the least admitting of explanation. I could only say that she was wrong in listening to such nonsense; that I loved her very dearly, and was only anxious for her to be happy; and by degrees the fit of petulance subsided; but I could not again approach the subject of Mr Macdonald, though it rested on my mind as a weight which I tried in vain to shake off.

CHAPTER LVII.

BEFORE I again heard from Miss Milicent, an application had been made for Stonecliff; it was to be let for a year, and Mrs Temple was preparing to go to the neighbourhood of London. Though I had been warned beforehand, the news came upon me like a thunderbolt, and in a moment faults of omission and neglect as regarded Mrs Weir, which I had never thought of before, seemed to rise up and reproach me.

I had been placed in a very difficult position, and had it but little in my power to serve her.

There were a hundred excuses to be made, but I felt that I had not done my utmost for her. Latterly, especially, I had been so engrossed in our own home affairs, that I had given her comparatively few of my thoughts and little of my time. Partly, indeed, this was owing to Mrs Temple, who often interfered to prevent my seeing her; but Mrs Weir could not be expected to understand this, and, whenever I did visit her, always seemed to be so comforted by her trust in me, that it made me more and more anxious to be of some permanent use to her. I believe

she fully believed that I was working all this time to further her wishes, whilst I was conscious that I was doing and could do nothing for her. This always made me very unhappy, and now she was to be taken quite away from me for months, perhaps even entirely; for, in spite of Mrs Temple's economy, I shrewdly suspected she had been living beyond her means, and that the removal from Stonecliff was but the first step to larger measures of retrenchment. If this were so, Mrs Weir, as long as she was with her, would be the first to suffer. I pondered the matter till I grew nervous in my anxiety, and at last I did, what lately I had been almost afraid to do; I went to Roger to open my heart to him.

I found him consulting with Jessie over several notes which had just been received, answers to the invitations to the party. I was a little surprised to see so many, and Roger and Jessie were surprised also. They were reckoning up numbers, and found that if we asked any more, we should have at least ten more than we had at first calculated upon. Jessie enjoyed the prospect; she liked a crowd, she said, they should be all the merrier. Roger looked a little grave; but turned the case over to me.

'We are in a difficulty, Ursie,' he said; 'I don't see how the rooms will hold them all.'

'There is the barn,' I said, in a joking tone.

'The barn! oh! yes, how delightful!' exclaimed Jessie. 'I never thought of that. Don't you remember, Roger, when Mr Stewart gave his tenants' ball, we all danced in the barn? I declare, Ursie, you have the best head of us all.'

'But I am not Mr Stewart,' said Roger, 'and I have no tenants.'

'And I did not know we were going to give a grand dance,' I added.

Jessie's face showed her disappointment. Roger smoothed her hair, and kissed her, as he said, 'We must keep within bounds, dear love, or folks will laugh at us. You know I am but Roger Grant of Sandcombe, and you are but Roger Grant's wife. I don't think it will quite do to go to the expense of fitting up the barn for a dance.'

'It would not be more expense than dancing in the great parlour,' said Jessie; 'but of course if Ursie objects'—

'If Roger objects, you mean,' I said. 'I have no voice in the matter.'

‘O Ursie! as if Roger did not do everything you thought right. Why, you know you are quite mistress here.’

‘Both are mistresses,’ said Roger, quickly. ‘Ursie, for the sake of auld lang syne, and Jessie, because she has such a grand name—Mrs Grant. You know the world will expect a great deal of Mrs Grant,’ he added, smiling fondly upon her.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘and so for once in a way I want Mrs Grant to take a little authority upon herself, and order things her own way, and leave me to go about a little business I have in hand. Roger, can I speak with you for a few minutes?’

He looked at Jessie, unwilling to leave her. ‘You are vexed, little one,’ he said; ‘but you don’t think I would say “No” if I could help it?’

‘No,’ replied Jessie, ‘only’—

‘Only what? let us have it out.’

‘Only Ursie does put herself against things, and if, as he says, I am mistress’—

‘But you are not mistress, love. How should we get on without Ursie?’

‘But Jessie is mistress,’ I said, ‘and she must learn to manage for herself. I only want her to do it in all things, not only when it is a question of a party.’

‘You are sisters,’ said Roger; ‘which will settle the difference. You agree to that, don’t you, Ursie?’

‘Yes,’ I said, but I don’t think my tone pleased him. He looked from one to the other in annoyance. I knew so well what was passing in his mind. ‘Oh! you women, how difficult you are to manage, with your petty jealousies!’ Perhaps I might have retaliated with, ‘Oh! you men, how provoking you are with your want of straightforward, moral courage!’ But I could not retaliate upon Roger, it was too deeply painful to me to feel that in any way, even in judgment, he could be in fault.

Jessie, who really was very good-tempered upon the whole, quickly recovered herself, and saying that she did not want to make a fuss, no doubt we knew best, carried off her notes to make a list of the persons who had accepted the invitation, after which she said, she should ‘go and look after William.’

‘She is very good and dear, isn’t she?’ said Roger, gazing after her as she left the room.

‘I don’t know what William would do without her,’ was my reply; ‘I am sure I could never find time to read to him as she does.’

‘And yet you are not satisfied with the place she takes in the house,’ continued Roger, ‘and you won’t accept the joint dignity of a sister.’

‘How do you know?’ I inquired, and I laughed a little, hoping to turn off the subject lightly.

‘I couldn’t help seeing it,’ he said—‘your face always was a tell-tale, Trot.’

‘Never mind what I will accept, or what I won’t,’ I said. ‘We shall do very well if Jessie will only remember that some day I may leave her, and that she had better practise being mistress beforehand.’

He thought a little upon the answer, but he did not press the matter. I think he knew me too well to force upon me a subject which he saw I avoided; and we began talking about Mrs Weir. Then he was quite himself—the Roger of the olden time, full of sympathy, understanding just what it was that troubled me, and giving me the best advice. I was not, he said, to consider myself responsible for the duties which others might choose to put upon me. Miss Milicent’s having said that I was to look after her mother did not make it my business or take the burden from her, so he begged me not to trouble myself because occupations at home had prevented my doing as much for Mrs Weir as I could have wished. The hopes I had held out myself were of more consequence. He thought I had been a little hasty in leading Mrs Weir to trust so much in me, but I was bound to help her if I could, and he considered that I ought to go over to Stonecliff and see her again, and if I found her seriously nervous at the prospect of going away, I should lose no time in putting the case before Mr Richardson, and consulting with him either by speaking, or writing to him if he was still kept away, upon the best measures to be taken to bring Miss Milicent back, and replace Mrs Weir in an independent home. Of course this required thought and judgment, for I was in a position which would make it extremely impertinent in me openly to interfere. Roger ended his advice by a hearty kiss and an assurance that he trusted me entirely, and did not know any person who would manage such a difficult business better.

The praise was very pleasant, but I could not live upon it. It elated and brightened me for the rest of the day, and Roger was satisfied, I suspect, at seeing me in good spirits; but when things rest upon a false foundation, there can be no real stability for happiness. I had said all I dared say about the party, but when

I found Jessie still bent upon asking every one at once, I had nothing to do but to give in,—and arrange it in the best way I could. It certainly did provoke me to have so much trouble put upon me, as if it was only my proper share, and I could not help thinking that if Jessie had been in my place, she would have been less anxious for numbers; but I tried, I hope heartily, not to show what I felt. The party was fixed for that day week. The notion of the barn was given up. Roger was firm about it, and William quite scouted the idea, and we did not say we were going to dance;—but when such numbers were brought together,—especially people from Hove, who would come a distance of seven miles,—I knew we must do something in the way of dancing, to amuse them. I think Jessie was pleased when she heard in a roundabout way through Martha, that every one was talking of the grand party to be given at Sandcombe, and I was pleased so far that it brought Mrs Kemp over to know the truth of the report, and ask if she could be of any use. John Hervey drove her over. I was glad to have the opportunity of talking to him about Mrs Weir, for I knew that I might not have him long to consult. He talked of taking another house now that he had more money, and moreover he was so continually at Longside, and with Mary Kemp, that I had little doubt how things were going on, and that he would soon be entirely taken up with his own affairs. ‘What is all this I hear, Ursie?’ said Mrs Kemp, as she came into the parlour, looking the picture of kindness and good-humour. ‘Fine doings and strange ones they tell me!—I hadn’t a notion that Sandcombe could excite such a commotion in the world.’

‘What do you mean?’ I said.

‘Why! I was in Hove yesterday, gossiping as you know one always does there—and wherever I went it was “Well! Mrs Kemp, of course we are to meet you at Sandcombe,”—till at last I opened my eyes, and found that I was in for a grand entertainment, instead of a quiet little tea-party. Whose doing is it?’

‘I can tell,’ said John Hervey; ‘not Ursie’s, you may be sure.’

‘Not mine, indeed,’ I said; ‘but when one hasn’t strength to go against the stream, one must needs turn round and go with it;—so, dear Mrs Kemp, you are come just in time to give me all kinds of advice,—and, Mr Hervey, you are just in time too, for I wanted to ask you what you had heard lately about Stone-cliff and Mrs Weir.’

'About Mrs Weir is soon told,' he said; 'she is gone.'

'Gone!' I exclaimed; and I felt terribly frightened. 'Where? What do you mean? Gone! By herself?'

'Not quite so bad as that. Mrs Temple has carried her off safely enough. But the report is, that it was not till Mrs Weir had made the effort to walk off by herself.'

I sat quite silent for a few moments, for I was thunder-struck; bitter tears of self-reproach gathered in my eyes, and I added—

'I would have seen her, I would have done anything for her, God knows; but lately they would seldom let me go near her. Poor lady! and she must have thought me so neglectful. Did she really try to go away by herself?'

'So they say,' replied John. 'That is, the night before last she got up, and began packing her things, and saying she couldn't be absent from her husband any longer, and talking so that the young woman who took Jessie's place was quite frightened, and called up Mrs Temple: and the end of it was, that yesterday afternoon they all went off, where, no one seems quite to know. Letters are to be sent to London. The cook who is left in charge of the house brought me a note from Mrs Temple about some business matters, and that was how I heard it all, for they kept it very close. She says that she is nearly sure Mrs Weir believed she was really to be taken to her husband, but of course there is no thought of that.'

'They are much more likely to take her to a lunatic asylum,' said Mrs Kemp.

I started up, and almost screamed. 'Oh! never, never, it is impossible. She is no more out of her mind than I am. It is only the way they have gone on with her.'

'There is no fear of an asylum,' said Mr Hervey. 'At least not without clear proof that her brain is troubled. Mrs Temple knows quite well how far she may go. Most likely she is taken up to London for medical advice.'

'One drop of kindness would do more for her than a hundred drops of medicine,' I exclaimed. 'Oh! if I had never left her, if I had only gone my own way and lived with her!'

'Matters mightn't have been one jot better,' said Mrs Kemp, quietly. 'We mustn't judge of anything we do by its consequences, Ursie?'

I fancied John Hervey looked as though he rather agreed with me, and considered I had been wrong; and I remembered how,

some time ago, he had blamed me for not interfering to prevent Mrs Weir's going to Stonecliff. The thought was very painful to me, and my head was in such a state of confusion from surprise and worry that I could not reason clearly.

'Poor child! I don't like to see you take on so,' said Mrs Kemp, for I could keep up no longer, and my tears fell fast.

'I believed I should hear from Miss Milicent to-day,' I said; 'and then I meant to have gone over at once to Mr Richardson, if he is come back, and consulted him.'

'He came last night,' said John; 'I should not wonder if that had something to do with Mrs Temple's sudden move. She has a mortal dislike to Mr Richardson, only one degree greater than she has to you, Ursie.'

'She is a wretch,' I exclaimed; 'a hypocrite!'

Mrs Kemp gently touched my arm. 'Not quite, Ursie. I dare say she thinks that she is going the right way to work.'

'She may do so,' I replied; 'but one thing I am quite sure of, that the thing which deludes Mrs Temple, if she is deluded, is her own selfishness. It was to suit her own convenience that she first took Mrs Weir into her house, and it is to suit her own convenience that she keeps her there, and it was for that she was always preaching about self-denial, and taking from Mrs Weir all the little things which amused and pleased her. And it is selfishness, too,' I added, 'which keeps Miss Milicent abroad; and they may, both of them, build up ever so fine a fabric of good in their own fashion, but the foundation is selfish, and therefore I have no faith in any of it. I must say it out, and then I shall be better.'

John Hervey smiled. 'Well! Mrs Kemp,' he said; 'we shall know where to come if we want to learn the use of strong words. I think I had better go out, and find William or Roger, and leave you to calm Ursie down if you can.'

It seemed very unkind in him to leave me so; but I was too proud to show what I felt.

He went to the door, and then came back looking for his hat.

'You needn't part as if you were angry,' said Mrs Kemp.

'I am not angry,' I replied, 'but I know Mr Hervey blames me. Yet it cannot be so much as I blame myself. If I had lived with Mrs Weir, all this would never have happened.'

'That is, if you had had the ordering of events, they would have been different,' said Mrs Kemp. 'Ursie, that is surely a bit presumptuous. You did your duty.'

I longed, I can't tell how much, for John to say the same. I felt it was the only thing which would satisfy me.

'John Hervey thinks so,' continued Mrs Kemp.

'John Hervey does not think so,' I replied, looking at him.

He stood quite silent for an instant, then taking my hand as though to wish me good-bye, he said earnestly, 'John Hervey does not know what he thinks, except that he would cut off his right hand to see you happy. If possible, you shall have news of Mrs Weir in the course of a day or two.'

Mrs Kemp's eyes were fixed upon me intently.

'He is such a true, kind friend,' I said, as he left the room. I was afraid whether she might think he was heartier in his manner to me than he was to Mary.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MRS KEMP and I were left alone for nearly an hour. Jessie was gone over to Dene to call on Mrs Price. I had wished Roger to let the acquaintance drop, but, as he said, there seemed a kind of ungraciousness in this, when Mrs Price had shown Jessie so much kindness, and therefore he went with her, making an excuse of business with Captain Price. I did not know that there was much to object to, only it was perpetually going about, and this I said to Mrs Kemp when she asked me, in her blunt way, how things were working.

'If I was not here,' I said, 'she and Roger would both see matters differently, and I don't think he would be so foolish with her; but as it is, there is no doubt he spoils her. Sometimes I fancy it would be right in me to determine upon making a change for myself.'

'You had better wait till the way is pointed out,' replied Mrs Kemp. 'It would be making yourself responsible for a good deal to go away and leave Jessie to herself; though I don't at all say it might not be better for her by and by.'

'If one could be quite sure of her,' I said; 'but she frightens me a good deal sometimes. Her very good-nature is a snare, she is so willing to please every one, and that, and the love of going out, one can never say how much mischief it may lead to—and Roger, so blind as he is.'

'There will come some children, by and by,' said Mrs Kemp, 'and that will make a great difference. It sobers a woman vastly, Ursie, to have little helpless things to take care of.'

'And till then I must look after her,' I said. 'Dear Mrs Kemp, are sisters made for nothing but to look after their brother's wives?'

'You are sharp, Ursie,' replied Mrs Kemp.

Yes, I was sharp, and I was sorry for it directly.

'If it had been any one but Roger,' I said; 'but that he should have thrown himself away!'

'Roger was your idol, my dear,' said Mrs Kemp very gravely.

Her tone struck me forcibly. I did not know she read my heart so well.

'Yes,' I said, 'he was my idol.'

'And God has broken your idol. It seems to me you have more cause to be thankful than to complain.'

'Ah,' I said, 'you don't know. The feeling grew up with me from childhood, I had no one else to look to.'

'Except God.'

I could make no answer.

'I suppose, my dear,' continued Mrs Kemp, 'most of us make idols to ourselves some time in our lives. I know I have done so; and I remember how unjust I was in consequence.'

'Unjust!' I exclaimed.

'Yes, my dear. It must be unjust to fancy a man an angel, and then to quarrel with him because he proves himself a man.'

'You mean,' I said, 'that I am hard upon Roger.'

'I think, my dear, that what would be called mistakes in other people, are called faults in him, and that is rather hard.'

'Only because I loved him, because I do love him so dearly,' I said; 'there is no one like him now.'

'I don't think there is, my dear. The way he goes on working, and improving, and setting an example all round the country, is quite a lesson, as the farmer says; and if he does let his wife go out a little, and see her friends, it is never at the expense of his own business. Just see how Sandcombe has improved since he has had it.'

'Yes,' I said, for I was delighted to hear him praised, 'he has turned off the idle men, and the new ones are kept twice as strictly, and he has his eye upon all the cottages; and as to the house, it is not like the same place.'

‘And he has but one fault,’ said Mrs Kemp; ‘he over-indulges his wife.’

‘Only one,’ I replied; ‘but that is a great fault; at least, it may lead to great evil.’

‘I grant you that,’ she answered. ‘A good man’s one fault, I often think, does more mischief than a bad man’s twenty sins, which sounds a hard doctrine, but I doubt if it isn’t a true one. Anyhow, it is vexatious.’

‘And it seems so unkind to dwell upon it so much,’ I continued, ‘when I think how very kind and thoughtful he has been towards me. How few brothers would have hesitated to marry because their sisters had an indirect claim upon them? And I am sure Roger was quite honest when he said that he would not have thought of his own happiness if it had stood in the way of my having a home and a provision.’

‘Very few, indeed, my dear,’ observed Mrs Kemp, emphatically; ‘and yet it would be wrong to quarrel with those who take a different view of duty. We must not lay more burdens upon others than God has thought fit to do. There is no doubt that you could very well have worked for yourself.’

‘And so it was all the more kind of Roger to be so considerate,’ I added. ‘Yes, I see that plainly; it is a constant reproach to me when I feel provoked with him or with Jessie. But, dear Mrs Kemp, how can one help one’s feelings? I think I am a little better than I was; but just at first, when they came home, every word and action seemed to jar upon me.’

‘There is fault on both sides, probably,’ she replied. ‘All your life, Ursie, you have expected more from Roger than any sister has a right to do.’

‘It was love,’ I said, ‘not exactingness.’

‘But love is no excuse,’ answered Mrs Kemp; ‘at least so it seems to me. You know, Ursie, God has been pleased to put us in certain relations to each other, by the ordering of His providence. We may alter these relations, but we can’t expect Him, therefore, to alter His providence.’

‘I don’t quite understand,’ I said.

‘Why, it is just this. God made you and Roger brother and sister, not husband and wife. It is His will that a wife should come first, and a sister second. Now, if you bestow upon Roger a wife’s affection,—and you do so when you are anxious to keep him all to yourself, and give up everything else for him,—you do in a way alter the arrangement which God has been pleased to

mark out, and you mustn't be surprised if things don't go quite easily in consequence.'

I did not quite like this repeated allusion to my private feelings. I hoped no one had ever noticed them. But Mrs Kemp was so simple and straightforward, there was no escaping from her remarks.

'I don't think,' I said, 'that I have had any choice in the matter. Whatever feeling I may have had for Roger, it grew up unconsciously.'

'But there was common sense to teach you, my dear,' replied Mrs Kemp; 'to say nothing of experience. Brothers marry, and sisters are parted from them, every day. But I do think you never would see that it was likely to be the same with Roger and you.'

Mrs Kemp was right there; I had wilfully shut my eyes.

She continued: 'And so, Ursie, I am afraid that some of the aggravations are of your own making. That doesn't mean that I am not sorry for you, dear child,' and she laid her hand kindly on mine.

I felt proud for the moment, and answered, 'No doubt I am to blame; but I can't help thinking that if Roger had been only like any other brother to me, I should still have been jarred by a great many things when they first came home.'

'Very likely,' she replied. 'It is a rare case when new relations are formed in a family without jarring. Sisters are jealous, and brothers are inconsiderate, and young wives don't quite know their proper position; and so between them, as often as not, they make a mess of it.'

'I don't think Roger is inconsiderate,' I was going to say, but I stopped, for I remembered some trifles in which he certainly had been so; but not choosing to blame him, I added: 'It may have been quite right, but it did seem strange to see Jessie, all of a sudden, taking upon herself to do everything for Roger which I had been accustomed to do, and to hear her enter into all our affairs as if they were her own; when, three or four weeks before, she would have felt it quite a favour if we had told her anything about them.'

'That is just what I meant,' replied Mrs Kemp. 'I speak the more about it, because it was the blunder I made myself when I married. I rushed into my husband's family, and because they were good-natured to me, thought I couldn't do better than make myself quite one with them; and so I took it for granted that I

was to hear everything, and talk of everything, and give my opinion, till at last I found out that, what they were quite willing to offer me as a favour, they were not at all willing that I should all of a sudden claim as a right. I drew back then, and was more timid, and only worked my way by degrees, and in the end it all came right, but it was some time first. Even as regards attention to her husband, a young wife is more prudent in keeping a little quiet when she is with his family. She will have opportunities enough of looking after him in her own home. Remember though, Ursie,' added Mrs Kemp laughing, 'that is only one side of the question. I say it is prudent and kind for a wife to remember these things; but I don't say that a sister has any right to quarrel if she forgets them. Husband and wife are meant to be all in all to each other.'

'And to show that they are so?' I said. 'I wish I could have thought of that more when Roger and Jessie first came home; I am sure I should have borne things better. Jessie has no notion of concealing anything she feels; and it was "darling" and "dearest" constantly, and a great deal more expression in all ways than I should have thought Roger could bear. But I was wrong. I do really think I was wrong in caring about it.'

'Such a time is trying to all, my dear. I don't think you were wrong exactly. It is a thing one can't be expected to get over suddenly, when persons who, a short time before, were just kind and polite to each other, begin using such very affectionate terms without hesitation. And you had but a short apprenticeship; for Roger and Jessie weren't engaged very long, and she always seemed to me rather too much afraid of him than to be very outspoken as to her feelings. If we could place old heads upon young shoulders, young people would be careful how they thrust their fondness for each other upon their relations, however near and dear. It is not pleasant to witness, I know that by experience.'

'No,' I exclaimed, 'not at all; and what is worst, is for them to turn round, remembering one is present, and give one a kiss, as a kind of apology.'

Mrs Kemp smiled. 'Trials! my dear, trials! But there is one cure for them,—to look at the truth. The feeling is not wrong, only the expression is unwise. Happy marriages are not so frequent that one should be put out at anything which gives proof of affection. If Roger had been gloomy, and Jessie cold, you would have been much more unhappy.'

‘I should have been miserable,’ I exclaimed.’

‘And twenty years hence, if it should please God to spare all your lives, the very words and actions which give you a turn now, will be your comfort and delight. I am sure, Ursie, you like to see old married people fond of each other ; witness what I’ve heard you say about my dear old man and me.’

‘If you were to kiss and call each other “dearest” all day long, I shouldn’t care,’ I exclaimed, earnestly. ‘Dear Mrs Kemp, you know it does my heart good to see the farmer and you together. It makes one feel that, after all, married love is not delusion.’

‘It is no delusion, my dear,’ she answered ; ‘it is a very great and blessed reality. But when first granted, young folks don’t understand it, and their heads are most times turned by it ; all the more reason, Ursie, why old folks, and quiet-minded ones, should be patient, and exercise the “charity which beareth all things.”’

Mrs Kemp talked a good deal more after this upon more general subjects, and in most of them I think we agreed. One piece of advice given me I particularly remember. It was as to the way in which I should look at disagreeable things ; such, for instance, as the frets caused by the false position in which Jessie was placed,—mistress, when she chose to give orders, and not mistress when she wished to escape from her duties.

‘It is very awkward and unpleasant, my dear,’ said Mrs Kemp ; ‘and I don’t think you will gain anything by trying to persuade yourself that it is not. You know, Ursie, if you go to a child with a dose of medicine, which is not really nasty, and tell him that it is nice wine, ten to one but the child turns quite against it ; whereas, if you say that it is medicine, he drinks it down, and is surprised to find it so little disagreeable. We are all like children, it seems to me, and must needs treat ourselves upon the same principles ; and perhaps life itself, with all its trials, would be less hard if at the beginning we faced the fact, that it was intended to be medicine and not wine.’

Those words were a great help to me. Roger, and Jessie, and William, were so satisfied with everything, and so willing to imagine that I was satisfied also, that I had been trying lately to bring myself into their views, and fighting, as it were, against my own convictions. My mind rested quite quietly in the certainty that I had trials intended for my good, and that all was not as I

could wish, but as God saw best for me; and I was able then to acknowledge more thankfully the great alleviations which He had mercifully provided.

CHAPTER LIX.

FOR there were very great and hourly alleviations, and not alleviations only, but blessings. Looking back on the tone of complaint which has pervaded all I have lately been writing, it would seem as though I entirely overlooked them. But I trust this was not so. With a home and friends, and constant useful occupation, and the prospect of a certain independence, I might have been a source of envy to thousands. Perhaps the very absence of great anxieties made me all the more alive to lesser ones. Moreover there was one circumstance which I knew I ought never to forget. If Roger had settled in Canada, and I had been compelled to remain with William at Sandcombe, my life would not only have been sadly dreary; but the responsibility would have been greater than I could, with any comfort, have undertaken. As it was, the place was always cheerful, and Jessie, in her good nature, took a great deal from me in the way of waiting upon William, though even then she never seemed to acknowledge that the duty belonged to her especially, and that if she neglected it, no one else could be expected to attend to it. If an invitation or a plan for any kind of pleasure was proposed, she left William without a thought, considering apparently, that it was quite my place to provide for him whilst she was away. The result of this was, as I saw, that the occupation was in the end likely to become irksome, for no duty is a pleasure, unless we feel that it cannot be performed without us. Then it becomes important, and when it is important, we like it.

But I am always talking of Jessie and her shortcomings, and never of myself. In some ways I feel the subject too grave and painful to be entered upon willingly, for indeed this was not a good and happy period of my life internally. To be always in a fret, always prepared to be irritated, and to feel, whether justly or unjustly, that you have a cause for such irritation, is by no means conducive to that holy calmness and trust which we should

all strive to attain. And as Mrs Kemp suggested, I had begun life with a delusion. For I do not call my love for Roger in itself a fault. It was founded upon the pure and hallowed feelings of affection which God has implanted in every breast. But, in its extent, it was, little though I imagined it, very selfish. To keep him to myself, I would have excluded him from the highest happiness which earth can give. Now my heart in its loneliness was wandering over the dreary world, seeking rest and finding none, and at times returning to the ark, which had once been its shelter, only to find the door closed against it, and to set forth again on the seemingly hopeless search after a love on which to repose undoubtingly. Yet I did not understand myself. I did not know what I was suffering from, or what I needed, though it is all plain to me now. I believed, indeed, I felt that I was religious; I acted upon religious principles, I tried to frame my life according to the precepts of the Bible. When I spoke to others of their duties, it was always with reference to the one great motive of pleasing God. And the thought of the great account which I should one day have to give before Him, if not always uppermost in my thoughts, had still sufficient influence to be a constant check upon my evil inclinations, and a warning whenever I had given way to them.

But through it all, my heart,—my quick, earnest, devoted love,—was given to Roger. Instead of loving him for God's sake, I loved God, if I may say so, for his sake, and the result was that religion had never made me thoroughly happy. I do not say that I had yet found out my mistake, but my eyes were opening to it. When human affection disappointed me, my reason, if not my feelings, turned to God. Rest and comfort, and fulness of joy were I knew to be found with Him, and in the bitterness of my disappointment, I turned to Him almost without understanding why. Again and again when I had no one else to speak to, no friend to whom I could explain my wretchedness, I said it out to my Saviour, not so much praying Him to help me, as telling Him what I suffered. It was a relief always at hand, and insensibly it became very precious to me, and the thought that He could quite understand, that He knew and would make allowance for the worn and fretted feelings, which to others would have appeared only unreasonable murmurings, gave me a sense of freedom and confidence which I had never before enjoyed. So, by degrees, I began to understand the difference between the influence of religion as a duty, and as a

personal affection. Through the door which had been opened by disappointment religious love stole into my heart ; and when at length it nestled in the empty chamber, the peace that accompanied it, left no room for regret for the exaggerated earthly feelings which had departed for ever.

But I write as if all had been easy, as though when my idol was broken, I could at once turn and raise an altar to the true God. It was not so. There was an enemy ever at hand, and there is one still, striving to prevent the entrance of the holy affection which was henceforth to be my joy. That enemy was myself, my old, impatient, hard-judging self, urged and stimulated doubtless by the Evil Spirit who is waiting to destroy us. All that I have recorded of myself must plainly show how much I had to fight against. Even when I judged rightly, I erred in the manner of expressing my judgment. I have heard that I used to be called angular, and I have learned to look upon angularity as a great offence. In that last conversation with Mrs Kemp, though I really had tried to keep down my irritable feelings, and though she had said nothing which ought to have provoked them, yet I had spoken so as to stir up the unkind nature within me, and aggravated myself merely by the expression of my own opinions. And this was continually the case in talking to Roger ; I was beginning to feel that he felt it, and that he avoided the subjects on which we might differ in consequence. One hasty sentence destroyed the effect of twenty gentle ones. So, again, this sharpness of mine gave a bias to the view which I took of all that Roger and Jessie did. I was very clear and decided in my self-government, and I carried out the same principle in regard to others, and was never contented till I had cut and apportioned, as it were, every one's conduct, and settled under what head each action was to be placed. Having once made out to my own satisfaction that Jessie had no strict guiding principle of duty, and that Roger was weak in his affection for her, I allotted their various actions to these motives, and forgot that there might be others, far better, which were influencing them. For instance, when Jessie read to William till she was tired, I said to myself, 'she does it because she likes it better than looking after the servants.' I did not remember that, no doubt, she had an anxious wish to do something for her husband's brother in his helpless state ; and when Roger took her out with him, and left me to attend to the duties at home, I said that he was following out his unwise system of indulgence. I

did not consider that it is a husband's duty to make life pleasant to his wife if it lies in his power.

This was not a state of mind favourable to Christian charity, and it was therefore of necessity opposed to the love of God. I look back upon it now with great regret, and with only one comfort, that I was never blind to it, and never indulged it. On that day after the talk I had had with Mrs Kemp, I went to my room feeling discontented with myself without having anything positively to lay to my own charge, only being conscious when I took up my Bible, as I was accustomed to do, to read the Evening Psalms, that a mist was floating between myself and my Saviour ; that I could not come into His presence with that clearness of conscience, and quietness of spirit, which are essential for the enjoyment of His love. Of course there was only one thing to be done, to pause at once and inquire, with God's help, where the fault lay. Mrs Kemp had suggested it. I went over in my own mind all that had passed since the period of Roger's engagement, and saw as I had never seen before how false had been the relation in which up to that time I had placed myself with regard to him. I faced the future, its possible trials and certain vexations, and owned that there was but one way of meeting them ; to put away self once and for ever, to consider the good of others first, and my own feelings second ; to act, in fact, justly and truly in the new family relations which had been formed, recognising every claim, however distasteful, and then to trust that God would, in His mercy, heal the wound which had been made, by making me dear to Roger and Jessie, not merely from natural affection, but from the consciousness that I was their truest and kindest friend, and therefore essential to their happiness. When this point had been gained I was able to attend to my reading and prayers, and after they were ended I went down-stairs, and finding Jessie waiting upon William, took the opportunity of telling her that she was a much better sister to him than myself, for I had scarcely seen him all day. Jessie's face brightened as with sunshine when I said it, especially when William joined as lavishly in her praises. Whatever other faults Jessie might have, there was certainly no temper or angularity in her.

No news of Mrs Weir, beyond the fact that Mrs Temple had taken her to London ! A hundred anxious fancies crowded into my mind, all based upon that one speech of Mrs Kemp, that they might probably carry her to a lunatic asylum. Being very

ignorant of the ways of the world in such cases, I did not know that this is more easily said than done, and I was certain that, when nervous and excited, Mrs Weir was quite strange enough to induce any one to think that she was out of her mind. Not liking to interfere myself, I persuaded John Hervey to make friends with the woman who was left in charge of Stonecliff, and by her means, as she sometimes wrote to Mrs Temple's maid, to let me know what was going on. Miss Millicent's silence disturbed me a good deal, I feared my last letter must have gone astray, and I remembered what she had said about visiting Normandy, and thought it probable that might interfere with our having tidings of her for some time. Mr Richardson thought the same when I went over to Compton, and, finding him returned, told him exactly how matters stood, and why I was uneasy. He was a very cautious man, and did not let out much of his mind to me, but I could discover that he did not think I was anxious about Mrs Weir entirely without cause, and he said that he would himself write to Mrs Temple, and make inquiries, and would let me know what she said. He had no idea himself, that anything was amiss with Mrs Weir beyond nervousness, but he felt that unwise treatment might at last bring on the malady which Mrs Temple had often hinted to him she feared.

With this I was obliged to be satisfied, and there was not much leisure for indulging useless anxieties, as my attention was claimed by the preparations for the party, which interfered in no slight degree with the ordinary business of the farm. Indeed, since Jessie had gone out so much, it was almost more than I could do to keep things straight, and I often over-worked myself, not liking to ask for extra help, lest it might begin a system which in the end would be ruinous to Jessie's good principles, even if Roger could bear the expense. Jessie did now often say herself that I had so much to do; but I knew she would not care if there was another servant, and, once used to a certain number, she would never think she could do with less. We were to have a dinner for the Kemps and one or two of our particular friends first, and the rest were to come in the evening, and having only the two parlours to put every one into, there was a good deal of difficulty in the arrangements. But Jessie saw none. The small parlour, she said, would do for dinner; it would not signify being a little crowded; we could bring in the round table from the other room, so that there would be plenty of space for the dishes,

and every one would understand how it was; and then we could put the kitchen benches round the wall in the large parlour; and if there were not enough, we might borrow some, and so accommodate all in the evening; and whilst people were amusing themselves there, the little parlour might be cleared out for tea, and for any of the old people; and afterwards supper might be laid out in it. All this betokened a deliberate intention of dancing; for, without this, there was no reason why we should all crowd in such a way into the small parlour; and at last I taxed her with it, laughingly, saying I saw what she was aiming at, and she had much better own it at once, or we should make some great blunder.

She turned round to Roger, who had been listening to her plan with a face half-grave, half-pleased, being amused, as I could see, with her ingenuity.

‘I knew Ursie would not allow it, Roger,’ she said.

‘Please, dear Jessie!’ I exclaimed, ‘indeed, that is such a false way of putting it. Roger, will you only say what you wish?’

‘To please every one,’ he replied, with a smile; ‘which is just what you will say, Ursie, is impossible; and so, I suppose, it is. But it seems to me we are rather in for a dance, though we have not given out that it is to be one.’

‘Well, then,’ I said, lightly, for I felt it was no use any longer to fight the question; ‘if we are to do it, we must see to some things at once,—music, for instance.’

‘The fiddler from Compton will do quite well,’ said Roger.

‘He scrapes so,’ said Jessie, looking disappointed. ‘I said something to Mrs Price the other day, and she told me that when they gave their party at Dene, they sent for a man from Hove, who played beautifully, and, with the piano, they had charming music.’

‘Dear Jessie!’ I exclaimed, ‘did you really talk to Mrs Price about the party?’

‘Yes. Why shouldn’t I?’

‘It is so awkward to consult a person about a thing which she is not to take part in.’

‘I did say I wished she could come; but I didn’t exactly invite her,’ said Jessie, in a hurried tone.

‘And what answer did she make, my dear?’ inquired Roger, quickly.

‘She had an engagement for that evening,’ replied Jessie, ‘so

it was out of the question. But you both look at me as if I had done something very wrong. Mrs Price is not coming.'

'It would have been better to have consulted Ursie before you said anything,' replied Roger.

'Ursie doesn't like Mrs Price,' said Jessie; 'and, Roger, dear, I didn't mean any harm; but it came quite naturally, when I was there, having known her so many years, and she having been always so kind to me. And, besides, if we visit, I don't see why she is to be left out.'

It was a difficulty, certainly; and Roger, with Jessie by his side, was not likely to solve it. I could only be thankful for the engagement. But we were not to be set free from Dene quite so easily, for Jessie added, 'I had a note from Mrs Price just now, saying that she thought she could put off her engagement, and I was going to ask what answer I had better send back, only we began talking about other matters.'

'You never told me anything about this before, my dear,' said Roger, so gravely, that I thought if I had been Jessie I should have been frightened.

She answered, nervously, 'I forgot it when we drove home that day, and it has scarcely entered my head since; and as Mrs Price was not coming there was no need to think of it.'

'But there is need now,' I said. 'May we see the note, Jessie?'

Her manner showed hesitation: she did not seem to know where she had left it.

'You had better go and find it, my dear,' said Roger, and he sat himself down in a kind of determined attitude, which I knew meant that he was considerably put out.

Jessie went off. We remained silent for some moments. Then I said, 'It is awkward; but she cannot be expected to see things as we see them.'

Roger made no answer; and I did not venture any further remark. Just as we heard Jessie's step in the passage, however, he said, 'You and I should probably have done the same, Ursie.' And when Jessie entered, he went up to her, and took the note out of her hand with a good-humoured smile, quite as though nothing was the matter. He read the note aloud:—

'MY DEAR JESSIE,—I find I can alter my day for dining in Hove, and as it would be great fun to see your first party, I have a notion of driving over, with as many gentlemen as I can bring, which I know will make me welcome. I don't know whether I

shall persuade Macdonald to come ; but, anyhow, you may expect your affectionate friend,
‘JANE PRICE.’

Roger laid down the note, and I caught it up.

‘Gentlemen!’ I exclaimed. ‘I am sure we don’t want any of Mrs Price’s gentlemen here. What does it all mean?’

‘It means what a good many people think a good deal of,’ said Roger, laughing. ‘We ought not to quarrel with Mrs Price for a word, Ursie. But this threatens more than we were prepared for.’

‘I don’t think Mr Macdonald will come,’ said Jessie, and I thought she looked very uncomfortable.

‘There is something else scratched out,’ said Roger, ‘which I suppose refers to him, only it is not honourable to try and read it.’

I took the note from him,—I really don’t know why,—certainly with no intention of making out what had been erased. Then I laid it down, and accidentally looking at my fingers saw that they were slightly stained with ink. The erasure was a fresh one.

The feeling that came over me I shall never forget. I looked at Jessie, and my head seemed dizzy with doubt. Was it possible there could be any deception in her?

No, it was impossible. That sweet, smiling, confiding face could not be a mask, and she was even now making all the amends in her power for the foolish thing she had done, by taking upon herself more than the blame which Roger was inclined to give her.

‘It was very wrong in me, I know,’ she said; ‘I ought to have asked first, but the wish came into my head, and was out of my mouth, before I had time to consider; and I repented directly, and was so glad when Mrs Price said ‘No.’ It was quite a relief to me, and then it all passed away as if it had never happened, and I thought of mentioning what I had done, but I forgot it. That is all I have to say, but I am very sorry, very sorry indeed. Please, dear Roger, forgive me.’

It was but a small fault. No wonder that Roger forgave it easily, with such a look of happy, trusting love. I could see then why he had kept such a guard over himself—that he might not show anger till he had heard the whole story. He was a man of singular self-command, and had tutored himself so that he never to my knowledge said a word to repent of.

‘We must make the best of the business, now,’ he said; ‘and

if Mrs Price and the—what must we call them, Ursie?—come, they shall have the best welcome I can give. All the more because the visit is not likely to be repeated often. Jessie, love, Sandcombe and Dene were never made to run together, and so I'm sure you will remember, and let your communications with Mrs Price be kept within careful limits.'

He was quite enough in earnest then to satisfy even me, and Jessie, I perceived, was rather awed by him.

'Ursie quite feels with me, I am sure,' he added, turning to me just as he was leaving the room, 'and you will do well to consult her upon all points.'

He did not look at me, and I was thankful for it. The very moment he was gone, I went up to Jessie, and with the note in my hand, pointing to the erasure, said: 'Jessie, the ink was not dry. You scratched that out yourself.'

Her cheek flushed, she paused, then answered, 'Yes, I scratched it out. It was only, "he is not sure whether he would be welcome," and I thought Roger would not understand, or would ask questions, and I can't bear talking of it at all.'

The explanation was not satisfactory, and I answered, 'Roger understands most things. Even if he did not, it would be better, Jessie, to annoy him than to make a mystery.'

'Well, yes, I dare say you are right,' and she went away.

She did not like my advice I saw, neither did I like her way of dealing with Roger. I was more really anxious about her that day than I had been at all.

CHAPTER LX.

WEDNESDAY morning, the day of the party, arrived. It was a bright and calm day for the beginning of October, and I was glad to think that our friends who came from a distance would not be annoyed with wind and rain. Though I may seem to have set my face so much against the party, and to have complained of the work it caused, it must not be imagined that in my heart I at all disliked it. Every one, unless very well-disciplined, is apt to grumble more or less;—I don't mean that as an excuse, but a fact,—and when one is telling a story the little black dots of troubles stand out more clearly in one's

mind than the bright lines of pleasure. But I really liked the bustle, and was delighted when I found the whipt-creams turn out as well as they did, and enjoyed teaching Jessie to make the cake, and she and I and Roger had quite a merry half-hour, setting out the supper table, and describing all the dishes to William, whilst he, poor fellow! was pleased and glad to think he should meet so many of his friends. And then there was to be the cosy dinner first of all, with the Kemps, and old Mr and Mrs Brown, who had taken Hatton Farm, and I got quite into the spirit of the party before the day came, and rejoiced in the sunshine as much as Jessie herself. We were to dine at four o'clock; I did not like to have the dinner earlier, not knowing what we should do with the guests all the afternoon. Roger had given in to the notion of having the Hove fiddler for the evening, but he would not go to the expense of a piano, though Jessie urged it. About expense or show he always had his own way. All the morning I was very busy, and Jessie too, more so indeed than we need have been, for Martha, whose temper was never very good, took it into her head to be particularly *contrary* in all her ways, and gave us more trouble than was necessary. A piece of boiled beef, a pie, and some roast chickens, with sweet things, was to be our dinner, and the beef I knew would take a long time before it was properly done, but all I could say I could not persuade Martha to have it ready for boiling at the time I had named, and I had lost a good deal of my power over her since she had learned to call Jessie mistress, so that I could only beg, not order. At last Jessie came to me in despair, begging me to go once more and see about it myself, for Martha had let the fire go down, and then had heaped up such a quantity of coal, there was no heat in it, and all she could get from her was, there was plenty of time, and it would do very well. I was setting out the dessert, but I left it directly, and went into the kitchen, and Jessie undertook to finish what I had begun. 'You will never do without bellows, Martha,' I said; 'just go and fetch them;' and when they were brought, I knelt down before the fire and began to blow. Martha's temper grew worse at every puff. She kept near me, putting herself in my way, and leaning over the fire to stir something in a pot. I told her, that if she did not take care she would upset the saucepan, but my words were not attended to, and whilst looking round to see what the weather was like, I heard a cry, and at the same moment the hot water poured down upon me. Happily the greater portion

fell upon my dress, but Martha, of course, screamed as though I had been killed, and brought in Jessie, and Esther Smithson, and the charwoman, and William, and a man from the yard, all eager to know what was the matter. I believe I was the only quiet person in the kitchen. I was burned, and in a good deal of pain, but it might have been much worse. Thanks to Martha's bad fire, the water was not actually boiling, and if I covered up my hand at once with cotton wool, I knew I might save myself from any great suffering. My chief thought then was for the boiled beef, and I would not hear of Jessie's attending to me; 'I could manage,' I said, 'very well for myself.'

'You will find some cotton wool in my second drawer,' observed Jessie, as I left the kitchen, 'if you happen to have none of your own.'

It was a happy suggestion, for I had not had sufficient experience to keep a quantity of wool to provide against scalds and burns, so I went directly to Jessie's room. My hand being painful, I wrapped the wool round it at once, instead of carrying it off, and sat down by the dressing-table to rest, for I was more flurried and frightened than I quite knew at first. Jessie's work-box was on the table, and opening it to find a bit of tape I saw Mrs Price's note laid in it, apart from the envelope. Merely for the sake of neatness, I put the note into its cover. As I did so, my eye fell upon some words which I read without thinking, under the belief that they referred to the party. 'I have much to say to you, for I can't understand you after the letters I have seen. I shall be glad to hear what you have to say for yourself. I only saw the letters yesterday.' It was more startling than the scalding water, more painful far than the heat of the burn. I sat with the envelope in my hand thinking on it, asking myself what it could possibly mean, whilst every latent fear and suspicion rose up within me to increase my perplexity. How to satisfy myself, was my difficulty. To doubt is the most deadly of all the offences which can be committed against family union. If Jessie once imagined I doubted her, all my influence over her, and I had much, would be gone instantly. And what it was I doubted or suspected, I could not tell. Jessie had certainly been silly and vain before her marriage, and I could feel that she was silly and vain still, but I could not imagine her deceitful, and her love for Roger it was absolutely impossible to question. I had seen her much lately when thrown with different persons, and made a centre of interest and attraction, and

though she might be excited and pleased by the attentions she received, I always noticed that her eye sought Roger's, and that she was never satisfied unless he was near. He himself was so certain of this, that he would have laughed to scorn the notion that she had a thought or feeling which was not shared with him. And yet here was proof positive that she had. Mrs Price's words referred to something which he knew nothing of. And then Jessie's hesitation, and the words which had been erased. There must be a mystery. My heart sank within me. If it were only a case of want of confidence, thoughtlessness, girlish folly, yet if it shook Roger's mind, if it opened his eyes to the fact that he had made a mistake in his choice of a wife, what a life-long disappointment would be in store for him.

I was left to myself for nearly twenty minutes ; it was supposed that I was suffering pain and unable to work. I was suffering pain indeed, but of a very different kind from any which was suspected. But the quietness and solitude were very useful in soothing my perturbed mind, and before I again went down-stairs I had made up my mind what was to be done ;—nothing. The whole thing might be a trifle, at any rate it was evidently past. I would not make Jessie angry by inquiring into it, especially as she would be very likely to misunderstand the means by which I had gained my knowledge ; but I would watch carefully all that went on ; I would guard against anything like intimacy with Mrs Price ; I would be very kind and affectionate to Jessie ; and then, when I had fully gained her affection, and made her forget her conviction that the marriage was not entirely agreeable to me, I would some day discreetly lead the subject round, and if possible bring her to an explanation. By that time, for I felt it would be a work of time, she and Roger would, as I hoped and believed, understand and be so necessary to each other, that any confession of past youthful folly or imprudence would be a less shock to him.

The one thing I dreaded was Mrs Price. An unprincipled woman is much more dangerous than a bad man. The one is generally an open, the other a secret foe, and a young person like Jessie is so easily won upon, so willing to trust and be led, whilst there are no natural cautions to teach prudence and reserve. If once thoroughly influenced by Mrs Price, and led by her into anything like deceit, Jessie might risk Roger's happiness and her own for ever.

To say that I was as light-hearted when I went down-stairs

as I was when I came up, would be far from the truth. Happily my burned hand was a sufficient reason for being rather subdued, and every one supposed I was in pain, and blamed Martha for her carelessness accordingly. For myself I scarcely found it in my heart to blame her. Though I said that Mrs Price's words might only refer to some past trifling matters, I still had the dread that mischief might lurk beneath, and so I could not be too thankful for the accident which had led to my being prepared for it.

CHAPTER LXI.

WE had not been a very punctual household lately, Jessie's gaieties had interfered. But William was determined that everything should be in time on this day, and gave us no rest with his cautions about it. Jessie went up to dress at three o'clock, but I was not able to get away from the kitchen till half-past three, and even then I left it rather with fear, and was obliged to say that I would be down again to see that all was ready before dinner was taken in. I was decidedly the head servant and not the mistress now,—for Jessie was called upon to receive the guests, and I had to work till the last moment.

It was a good thing that I made up my mind to my position beforehand, because, having done so, I was not annoyed at it. My best dark-green silk dress was soon put on, with a temporary apron over it, in case I should have anything more to do in the kitchen; but Jessie's dress was a much more important affair.

I am afraid I was a little like Roger, and inclined to spoil her in some ways, I was so pleased to see her look pretty; and though I strove not to show that I thought much of her beauty, I was always watching to see what people would think of her when she came in and out of a room.

The art of dress, too, I think, generally goes with beauty. It is not that pretty people always think so much of what they shall wear, but that it is a kind of instinct with them.

I am sure I might have tried for months, and I should never have turned myself out to look in the slightest degree as well as

Jessie when she went to the parlour dressed in her delicate wedding silk. I stood looking after her as she ran down-stairs, and when she was out of my sight, remained still in the same position thinking about her, not happy thoughts, but tender, loving ones,—more so than she or Roger fancied. Hardness, severity, angularity,—they were all on the surface. There was a place deep down in my heart for Jessie.

Mr and Mrs Brown were asked to please William. I should have been better satisfied myself if they had been left out, we should have been such a snug party with only the Kemps; but perhaps it was better as it was on the whole, for we had one great disappointment. John Hervey, who as a matter of course had been asked also, did not make his appearance. We waited for him nearly a quarter of an hour, and then fearing the dinner would be spoiled, we thought it better to sit down. William was put out, more by the delay than by John's absence, but he kept his temper, as most of us can before strangers. Jessie took the top of the table, and did the honours very well. It was the first time since her marriage that we had had anything like a dinner party, and I fancied she would be nervous and ask me to carve; but she seemed fully to understand her right place, and many pleasant compliments were paid her by old Mr Brown, which she seemed quite to enjoy. Mrs Brown praised her for the way the dinner was sent up, and for the sweet things, which certainly were very successful. They happened to be all my making, and Jessie said so, colouring, as though she was rather ashamed to own it.

'It is not every one that has such a right hand,' said Mr Brown, thinking he must be civil to me.

'No, indeed,' replied Jessie. 'Ursula is a great help, I don't know what I should do without her.'

'What, indeed?' I thought to myself, and I was almost tempted to say that a person with so many engagements as Jessie wanted a right hand to keep the house straight; but, of course, I did not say it, and the conversation went on about housekeeping and farm troubles, and servants, in all which Jessie bore her part as though she was quite at the head of affairs; whilst, whenever any little matter went wrong, she quietly turned to me to put it right, as I can fancy the Queen would do to one of her ladies-in-waiting. It was one of Jessie's peculiarities that she could fit herself into any position in which she might be placed, and now I could see that Roger was quite pleased with

and proud of her,—she was so attentive and hospitable. Nothing was said at dinner which at all touched upon Dene, but when the dessert was placed on the table, Mrs Brown began praising some cowslip wine, which she declared reminded her of some she had tasted elsewhere ; but she could not remember where, and at last she said, that she thought it must have been at Dene.

Mrs Kemp looked up surprised. ‘I did not know you ever went there,’ she said. ‘I shall think better of Mrs Price if she has such steady friends.’

‘Don’t call us friends,’ replied Mrs Brown ; ‘it was only that my husband went over there accidentally to pay some money, and there came on a pouring shower, and so we were obliged to take shelter, and then Captain Price offered us cake and wine, which was more than his wife would have done ; if I don’t do her wrong in saying it.’

‘I think you do wrong her,’ said Jessie, quickly. ‘She is very kind-hearted, and would make friends with any one who would be friends with her.’

‘Oh ! yes, well, I dare say,’ and Mrs Brown looked a little awkward, ‘I forgot you and she were cronies ; indeed, I thought that would be all over now.’

‘My wife knew Mrs Price when they were both children,’ observed Roger, before Jessie could speak again ; ‘and as she is good-natured we must be civil, which is the reason why we have asked her here this evening.’

A general blank seemed to fall upon the party. Mrs Brown looked at Mrs Kemp, and murmured something which sounded like ‘No doubt, it is all right.’ But it was evidently not all right in her estimation, and the silence became so uncomfortable that I lost my presence of mind, and began pressing Mrs Kemp to take some apple jelly when she had some already on her plate, and poured out a glass of sherry for Mary Kemp, though she had begged for currant wine. Roger, I saw, was fully aware that the announcement he had made was disagreeable, but he was not in the least cowed by Mrs Brown’s stiff manner. Having once made up his mind that it was right to ask any one to his house, he was very indifferent as to what might be said about it ; but I perceived he was vexed when Jessie, for want, I suppose, of something to say, went on to boast of her intimacy at Dene, to describe the place and the alterations, and to talk of the persons she had formerly met there. Some of them, I suppose, laying

claim to the title of gentlemen and ladies, but not such as we had been accustomed to respect.

'My dear,' he said at last, 'those days are over. You were Jessie Lee then, you are Jessie Grant now,' and Mrs Brown pursed up her lip, and looked at Mrs Kemp with a matronly smile of approbation, which seemed to say, 'That is right. I am glad the husband can assert his authority over the giddy young thing.'

Mrs Kemp, Mary, and Mrs Brown went into the large parlour as it grew dark, whilst Roger and his other friends stayed to have their talk over public matters. There were so many little trifles still to be seen to that I was glad to have them all quietly disposed of, and I called Jessie into the kitchen, to arrange one or two things about the supper, which Martha and Esther would be likely to forget. When I went back to the parlour and Jessie was gone up-stairs, Mrs Kemp and Mrs Brown were in full talk, but they stopped directly I went in. Mary was sitting silent as usual. I fancied she was out of spirits because of the disappointment about John Hervey.

'They will be here soon, I suppose,' said Mrs Kemp, making room for me to sit down. 'Come and warm yourself, Ursie, you won't be so well able to do that presently.'

'Thank you, I said, 'but I have been out in the kitchen, which is like an oven.'

'I wish you would come,' said Mrs Kemp, looking round to see that I was alone. 'Now, Mrs Brown, just tell Ursie what you have been hearing, it will come better from you.'

'I dare say she knows,' replied Mrs Brown; 'unkind words fly fast, and I am not the one to wish to make them go faster.'

'It's no unkindness to give a warning,' said Mrs Kemp; 'and Ursie is quite safe.'

'Well! all I would say is, that if your brother Roger does the wise and respectable thing, he won't let Mrs Price bring herself and her idle friends to Sandcombe. His wife has been too much with them already, and when it's well known that there was flirting going on with that Mr Macdonald, whom people said last year she was sure to marry, up to the last moment before she turned round and said 'Yes' to your brother, you will understand that the world will talk of her as one of the Dene set.'

'People say what is false!' I exclaimed, though as I said the

word a pang of doubt shot through me. 'After Mrs Morris's death, Jessie came directly here, and went from us to Mrs Temple, where she was kept so close that if she walked over to Dene twice during the whole time it is more than I can answer for.'

'May be. I trust it isn't true,' said Mrs Brown. 'You know, my dear, I don't want to vex you, and I shouldn't have said it if it had not been for Mrs Kemp's wish; but hearing things as I do from every one, I can't help getting inklings of strange doings sometimes, and it does seem to me a pity that, after all the stories that has gone abroad about Mrs Price and her goings on, she should be asked to Sandcombe just the first party that a young person like Mrs Roger gives.'

'Ursie doesn't know half the stories,' said Mrs Kemp, in a feeling tone.

'No,' I said, 'I don't. I have always tried not to hear them. I think that kind of scandalous gossip is odious, besides being wrong; but without hearing the stories, I know quite enough to understand that Mrs Price is not a fit friend for Jessie. No woman who acts so as to have herself talked about can be.'

'Quite right, my dear,' said Mrs Kemp. 'Girls won't think it; but the worst thing that can befall them is for their name to be in every one's mouth.'

'And the worst thing for a husband is for his wife to be talked about,' said Mrs Brown, who was rather inclined to be severe. 'Your brother Roger is the last person, Ursula, who would bear that.'

The last indeed! Perhaps no one but myself knew how keen Roger's feelings would be on such a point. I don't know what I could have said in reply, but at that moment our circle was disturbed by the arrival of visitors.

I went to receive them with the words ringing in my ears—'Roger is the last person who would bear that.' The guests arrived one after the other very quickly. Jessie came down to do the honours, and I went to the party in the little parlour, and told them they must leave it whilst I made it ready for tea. William grumbled a little at being obliged to move, and I was obliged at last to scold and be impatient,—he and Farmer Kemp would stay so long trying to finish an argument.

'Why, lassie, what's come to you,' said the farmer, catching hold of me as I laughingly held open the door and told him

plainly I wanted him gone. 'She has taken to rule every one to-night, William, and that's not her way generally.'

'She loves a bustle dearly,' said William. 'I don't believe she is ever happy unless she is ordering something or somebody.'

I suppose my countenance betrayed that I was not thoroughly well pleased with the remark, for as William departed the farmer stayed behind, and added good-naturedly, 'They may quarrel with you, Ursie, as much as they like for ordering, but they would none of them get on without you. But why don't you ask my girl to come and help you? she would rather be here than talking grand in the parlour; she isn't in very good spirits to-night, the why and the wherefore I dare say you will hear before long, only don't ask questions now, for it will upset her, and I don't want that.'

Farmer Kemp had most unpleasantly and anxiously excited my curiosity. Mary's spirits were so even, I was sure it must be something very unusual which could depress her enough to excite notice. Putting things together, I naturally concluded the vexation must be about John Hervey. When I went back to the parlour I found Mrs Price arrived, and with her two Dene visitors, not exactly strangers. Roger had met them when he was riding out with the fox-hounds, which he did every now and then. Mrs Price was making much of them, sitting up at the top of the room, looking quite like the grandee of the company. The moment I went in I felt what a mistake had been made in inviting her, for her presence was like a wet blanket on the rest of the party. I glanced round to see what Jessie was doing, and was glad to find her, under Roger's care, trying to make herself generally agreeable. My dread was that, in spite of all she had once said to me about having changed her opinion of Mrs Price, she would now devote herself to her. Roger seemed to be as much alive to that possibility as I was, and was going round with her from one to the other, and giving her hints as to what she should do to be civil and kind. He was resolved, I saw, that if Mrs Price forced herself upon us, she should find herself placed quite on an equality with the rest of the world. Finding how things were going on, I was relieved from a sense of responsibility, and, following Farmer Kemp's suggestion, went to Mary, and asked her to come with me into the parlour, and help set out tea. Then she and I might stay there and make it, and Jessie might

bring in different parties, as the room was too small to have all together. Mary was only too glad, she said, to be useful, and went back with me to the little parlour directly; but she had another reason for desiring to be alone with me, for the moment Martha, who was setting out the tea, was gone, she drew out of her pocket a little note. 'It is from John Hervey,' she said. 'I was to give it you when you were by yourself, in case he didn't come, and I have no hope of him now.' She spoke very calmly, but a sigh followed the words. It sounded strange to me. Mary seldom laughed, often smiled, and scarcely ever sighed. 'Just see to the tea, Mary, dear,' I said, and I drew the candle towards me hurriedly. I had a dread that the note contained ill news.

'DEAR URSIE,—I have had a note from a London doctor asking me odd questions about Mrs Weir's being able to attend to business. I don't understand it, and don't like it, so I am going off myself to see what it all means. You shall hear again. If there should be anything in which your testimony as to Mrs Weir's soundness of mind is likely to be of use, I am sure you would not object to giving it. A rumour has reached me that Mr Weir is dangerously ill, at some little village in Normandy. If I could have been with you to-night, I should have found out something from Mr Macdonald, who, I heard accidentally, was likely to be one of the party. He is in correspondence with Miss Milicent. If you could ask him what he knows, and send me word, I should be glad. Of course, I am very sorry not to be one at your merry-making, though I like Sandcombe best when you are all alone. Don't say to any one why I am gone.

'Very sincerely yours,

'JOHN HERVEY.'

As I folded up the note again, I remarked that Mary had left off arranging the tea-cups, and was standing with her gaze intently fixed upon me. She blushed when our eyes met, and I thought she half expected me to give her the note, but I put it into my pocket without saying anything, and she finished preparing the tea, and then asked if she should go and tell Jessie it was ready. It was as though she was glad to leave me. A second care frequently neutralises a first, and a third will often prevent one from thinking of either. What with Jessie's secret and Mary's, and anxiety about Mrs Weir, I had so much to

perplex me that I could do nothing but put it all aside, and take just the business of the moment. I laughed and talked with every one who came in, made myself, I am tolerably sure, agreeable to Mrs Price, and behaved very civilly to her friends. In fact, I could not properly keep any one fixed idea in my mind, and having intended to watch Jessie, I found myself at last quite disregarding her. Tea being over, some of the elderly people remained in the little parlour to play whist and backgammon, and the young ones began to dance. I was asked to dance almost before any one, but I was obliged to refuse, at least for a while, since Jessie quite depended upon me to set everything going. Roger had left her to herself now, and I thought she looked a little fagged, as if such numbers were too much for her, and I begged her to go and sit down by Mrs Kemp, and rest a little and not talk. Mrs Kemp, I said, would quite understand her wishing to be quiet. This was just when a country-dance was beginning, and she left me, as I thought, intending to do what I had proposed, but to my annoyance I perceived that Mrs Price, who, I fancied, was sure to dance, was sitting down also, and that Jessie went up to her immediately.

I noticed her but little after that for nearly half an hour; the dance was kept up merrily, and I went to see how all things were going on in the little parlour, and then stayed a few minutes in the kitchen, giving an order about supper. On my return to the dancing-room, Mrs Price and Jessie were not to be seen. I looked, and waited, and watched, and looked, but they were still absent. They were gone, I felt sure, to Jessie's room, that they might have Jessie's favourite amusement—a talk. Nothing would annoy Roger more, and Mrs Kemp, I saw, was noticing Jessie's absence, and Mrs Brown's quick eye wandering all round the room, as she wondered what had become of her. This would not do. She must be brought down, and made to be attentive to her company at all events, and I hurried up-stairs, knocked at Jessie's door, heard Mrs Price's voice say 'Come in,' and entering, found Jessie in a flood of tears. My consternation need not be described, but Mrs Price came forward to explain with the utmost coolness—'Poor Jessie was a little over-tired, hysterical—she had been working too hard—such a large party was a great undertaking. If I would only leave her to her, she would take the greatest care of her, and bring her down again in a few minutes quite well.'

'I think, if you will allow me to say so, Jessie had better be left to me,' I said; 'I know exactly what is good for her.'

'Oh! no doubt,' and Mrs Price became very stiff and proud; 'but Jessie herself will be the best judge. Such an old friend as I am, I think, might be allowed to stay.'

'Leave us, Ursie, indeed you must,' said Jessie, in an eager voice. 'They can't do without you down-stairs. I would rather a great deal, and I shall be down directly; do go.'

'I had better bring you some sal volatile,' I said; 'you won't do without it.'

'I want nothing, nothing,—it isn't anything. I only wish—please just go.'

'I shall send Roger to you,' I said, quietly, for I felt that Mrs Price, if not Jessie, was deceiving me. Jessie's voice showed neither hysterics nor faintness, but only great mental disquiet. I left the room, heard the door close violently behind me, hurried down the stairs, and at the bottom, rushed up against some one in the dark passage, and found myself in contact with Mr Macdonald.

He made a hasty apology for coming so late, which I was too worried to attend to; why he came at all was the question I was most inclined to ask. I thought we had been safe from him. I could not find it in my heart to be gracious and civil, and I don't know what I said, until we stood at the parlour door; then I suddenly recollected John Hervey's note, and, seizing upon the present moment as the most favourable I could hope to have, begged for a few moments' conversation with him. He seemed astonished, and I thought nervous, but of course he assented, and much, I suspect, to the surprise of the friends who knew or thought about me, we entered the room rather confidentially together. Before, however, I could begin the subject of Mr Weir, Mrs Kemp came up to me and inquired for Jessie; was she ill?—tired—was anything amiss. 'Nothing,' I said, shortly. 'She will be down directly,' Mrs Kemp looked vexed, and drew back. Mr Macdonald asked where Mrs Grant was, and he put up his eye-glass and glanced round the room.

'Oh! I see. I beg your pardon, but I will return directly;' and he left me to go up to Jessie, who, just at that instant, came in, her arm within Mrs Price's, as if they were the dearest friends possible.

The meeting certainly was a curious one. I, who knew Jessie so well, could read at once in her countenance a mixture of fear,

dislike, and excitement, which she vainly endeavoured to hide under an appearance of ease. Mr Macdonald's face was not so well known to me ; but if I could at all guess its meaning, there was a great deal of pride and spite in his heart. Mrs Price was full of flattery and airs, making such a fuss about him, that I could not bear to look at her, and talking so loudly that every one was noticing her, and necessarily observing Jessie also. This could not be allowed to continue. I felt as though I must rush up to Jessie, and carry her away from them by force ; but just then, the reel which had been going on when I came in, was finished, and, in the general movement, Jessie was obliged to move also, and Mr Macdonald returned to me, ready, as he said, for our conversation. It was precisely what I did not want,—to have a private talk with him when every one was sitting down, and might remark upon us ; but a clear conscience makes one bold, and knowing full well that I would never have said half-a-dozen words to him but from necessity, I began at once—

‘ You have heard from Miss Weir, lately, I think, Mr Macdonald, have you not ? ’

‘ Yes, this week. I have had that honour.’

‘ And may I ask what the accounts of Mr Weir are ? Some one told me he was very ill.’

‘ Miss Weir mentioned an indisposition—a fever, I think, she called it.’

He looked so intolerably conceited, I turned away my head, because I could not endure to watch him. ‘ Is it a dangerous illness ? ’ I said.

‘ Well ! yes, I suppose it may be. Miss Weir’s communications touch slightly upon the subject ; ’ and he put on a very mysterious air.

‘ I suppose you would not mind giving me Miss Weir’s direction,’ I continued ; ‘ I am wishing to write to her.’

He hesitated. ‘ I believe Mr Weir is moving about. If you wish that a letter should be forwarded, and would entrust it to me’——

‘ Thank you,’ I said, hastily ; ‘ but it is not written. Miss Milicent told me she should be in Normandy.’

‘ In Normandy ? yes, she may be.’

‘ But you must know where she was when you last heard from her,’ I said. ‘ If you would only tell me that, it would help me.’

‘It was an odd direction. French names are difficult to remember. I may be able to give you the information to-morrow, or the next day,—or,—I am almost afraid I may have mislaid the letter.’

‘Or you don’t wish to tell me, Mr Macdonald,’ I exclaimed. ‘I am sorry I have asked you.’

He made a kind of bow, more in mockery than politeness, and murmured something about being unfortunately unable to gratify my curiosity; and then walked away.

Mary Kemp drew near to me, as I stood thinking. ‘Ursie,’ she said, ‘that is an odious man. How Jessie hates him!’

‘Does she?’ I replied. ‘How can you tell?’

‘From her look when she saw him. But she liked him once. How is it she is so changed?’

‘She knows him better,’ I said. ‘And she has Roger.’

‘Yes, Roger, to be sure, that would be enough as a contrast; but I should be afraid if I had jilted Mr Macdonald. I should think he would be revenged.’

The expression struck me, and I repeated it, pondering upon it, but adding, ‘Jessie did not jilt him.’

‘I thought she did; people say so.’

I was called away, and there was no time to undertake Jessie’s defence; but I felt as though a clue had been given me, and throughout all the remainder of that evening’s excitement, I was bent upon the one object of following it.

Jessie, Mrs Price, and Mr Macdonald, were never for five minutes absent from my thoughts or my watchfulness. I saw that Jessie appeared to have recovered herself, but that her eye was restless, and her cheek flushed, and I noticed that Roger’s entrance made her shrink from Mrs Price, evidently unwilling that he should see them together. I noticed that she gave herself up almost exclusively to Mrs Price’s friends, dancing twice with the strangers, and only once with any of her old friends, and at last I saw her stand up with Mr Macdonald, looking at the same time, frightened and nervous, but talking as was her wont, all the time to cover her awkwardness. And, towards the end of the dance, I observed also that she became much graver, even, I might have said, unhappy; whilst there was something in his manner which implied, not liking certainly, but satisfaction and triumph. Mary Kemp might be right, but jilt him! No, Jessie certainly was free from that charge. And what could be his revenge? Oh! if Roger could but see with my eyes, if he

could only be alive to the weakness of Jessie's character, and keep her from those who might lead her to deceit. But he saw nothing except that his wife was winning, and lovely, and devoted to him. He was the only person in the room that night,—I felt it with uneasiness and dismay,—who did not perceive that some strong tie had been formed between Jessie and the inmates of Dene which, whether it existed with or against her will, could tend neither to his happiness, nor to her own goodness and respectability.

About eleven o'clock we were ready for supper. Mrs Price went in first, and Jessie with her of course. I stayed behind to take care of the second party. So I lost sight of her. Supper was a long business. I was very tired and glad to remain quietly by myself for a few minutes in the great parlour. Farmer Kemp came up to me and tapped me on the shoulder: 'Asleep, lassie; you ought to be waking.'

'My business is nearly over,' I said, 'I may begin to think of sleep.'

'Not yet,' he said, earnestly. 'What can that flaunting woman and her friend be talking about to your pretty little sister-in-law?'

I looked round; they were close to the open door. I was behind them, and I could not see their faces. When I moved, I caught sight of Jessie's countenance, sadly anxious; Mrs Price's sarcastic, the other was hidden. I heard Mrs Price say, 'I really must go and put on my cloak, it is late.' She went up-stairs, and Jessie stayed behind; she did not notice me,—I could have said, indeed, that she was too engrossed to notice anything except the person before her. 'O Mr Macdonald!' I heard her say, in a low, hurried voice; 'it is not honourable, and they can be nothing to you now.'

I did not catch his answer.

'You have deceived me,' I heard Jessie add; 'you said they were destroyed;' and then, seeing me, every trace of colour left her cheeks, and she rushed away.

Mrs Price's departure was quickly followed by others, only a few lingered round the supper-table till after twelve. Farmer Kemp and his wife, and Mary, were the very last. William sat in the corner of the room fast asleep, while Roger and Jessie were attending upon the friends who were just going. We heard the repeated 'Good-byes' and 'Thank you,' and 'We have had such a pleasant evening,' and Jessie's voice was cordial, and

Roger's full of thorough satisfaction that everything had passed off so well, and then they came back into the little parlour together.

'Here is a seat for you, little one, in the arm-chair,' said Roger. He placed Jessie in it, and brought her a footstool. 'You are tired out, I know; but so well you did everything! Didn't she, Ursie? I don't know when we have had such a jolly evening. What do you like to have, love? A glass of wine is best.'

'I like to have you next me,' said Jessie, 'I don't want anything else;' and her tired face resumed its bright look, as Roger laughingly sat down at her feet, and asked Farmer Kemp to give her a bit of chicken, and he would see that she ate it. The farmer cut the chicken as he was desired, but directly afterwards turned to me.

'Somebody else wants looking after,' he said; 'you've been upon the move for how many hours, Ursie?'

'I am too tired to reckon,' was my reply.

Roger jumped up from his seat, and came up to me. 'Are you really so tired, Trot?'

'Really,' I said, 'is it surprising?' and I laughed a little.

'Tired with thinking of every one but herself,' said Mrs Kemp, kindly, for she was extremely fond of me.

I might have been vexed at Roger's coldness at any other time; but just then I really could not think about myself at all. 'We must send Jessie to bed at once,' I said; 'she will be quite knocked up if we don't.'

'And leave you to set the house right, I suppose,' said Farmer Kemp. 'Well, there is nothing in this world like a good heart for work. Come, mistress!' and he spoke to his wife, 'since going is the order of the day.'

Mrs Kemp had her bonnet and cloak on, and was quite ready, so was Mary. I put one or two other wraps round them, for the night was cold.

As I was doing this, Mary Kemp said, in a low voice, 'Have you any note, any message, for John Hervey? Perhaps I shall be writing to him.'

'None, thank you. I have not had time to think about things.'

I fancied Mary looked rather blank, but my attention was drawn to another matter, for Roger said quickly, 'A glass of water, Ursie; quick! Jessie is faint.'

Her head was leaning back, and she was deadly pale, but she had not fainted away.

Roger was alarmed, I was anxious, Mrs Kemp was quite cool, and took it as a matter of no consequence. We all stood by looking at Jessie.

‘She has been talking, and laughing, and standing about more than is good for her,’ said Mrs Kemp, ‘but she will be quite well to-morrow. Now, my dear, if you feel better, let Roger take you up-stairs.’ And before Jessie seemed to be quite aware that she was able to move, Mrs Kemp had gently forced her to stand up, and, supported by Roger, she left the room. ‘Good night, Ursie, my dear, and go to bed, and to sleep, as quickly as you can,’ said Mrs Kemp, as I went out with her into the passage. ‘And don’t worry yourself, if you can help it, about things which can’t be helped or mended.’

‘And keep an eye upon that giddy little woman, Ursie,’ added the farmer. ‘Depend upon it, if you don’t, she’ll get you all into a scrape some day, through that flighty friend of hers.’

CHAPTER LXII.

I SLEPT but little, in spite of my fatigue. Thoughts of Jessie were haunting me; not the hard thoughts which Farmer Kemp might have had. There was no such vanity in her now as would make her disobedient to Roger, that I was convinced of; whatever folly she might be led into would be the consequence of some difficulty in which she had involved herself by past imprudence. Mrs Price had no real affection for her, but was making up to her for purposes of her own; perhaps wishing to show that she was not entirely overlooked by persons of respectability; perhaps—and just as likely—merely because she knew that we had set ourselves against the intimacy. Mr Macdonald, if he had ever really been attached to Jessie, which I very much doubted, clearly disliked her now; yet it seemed to me as though he and Mrs Price had her in their power, and were in some way tyrannising over her. And how this might end was, I confess, a very anxious and uncomfortable thought. Jessie was so weak, and so painfully deficient in moral courage, that I could never feel sure of her. Some deception there must

have been already, and more there might be; and with her ignorance and thoughtlessness, she would easily, without the least intention of real evil, be led to do and say things which would materially injure her in the eyes of the hard-judging world. I trembled for Jessie, but I was miserable for Roger. Even now, if he could see and know all that I knew, he would in all probability discover that his trust in his wife had been blind and mistaken, and how could I prevent the evil from going further?—how could I induce Jessie to be open, with that perfect openness which is the only security for married happiness, when she knew, even better than myself, that the acknowledgment of any past deception must shake Roger's confidence, and would almost necessarily be a great trial to his affection?

Jessie was not the person who would risk a present suffering for the sake of avoiding a greater future evil. Rather she would go on contriving, and evading, and delaying, and intending, keeping her eye upon truth in the far distance, and forgetting as she did so that she was following the untruth which stood immediately in her path.

An effort, however, must, I knew, be made at once. I had discovered quite enough to give me cause for demanding an explanation, and if she hated me for it, I still must have it. It was with this full intention that I went down-stairs to our late breakfast—yet one which was too early for Jessie. She did not make her appearance. Roger was up and out before I was ready, and William and I breakfasted together. The post came in before we had finished. There was a letter for me in John Hervey's handwriting; but William had some business letters, and I was obliged to read them first, and put my own aside. I was kept talking about things in which I felt no interest for more than ten minutes, and then, finding that William would not allow me any silence, I carried off my letter to read alone. It required but a few moments to get through it, but it left me in a state of bewilderment. It was written in pencil, and dated from the house of Mrs Weir's physician.

'DEAR URSIE,—

'I have but five minutes to save the post. I have seen Mrs Temple, Dr Green, and Mrs Weir. Mrs Temple is frightened, and not without cause. But they all say that if you could come up you might be of great use, for Mrs Weir is always asking for you, and they can't tell how to satisfy or keep her quiet. I said

plainly to Mrs Temple that she must undertake your expenses, and she is prepared to do so. Only don't delay. If you can be here to-morrow by the train which comes in at 3.25, Mrs Temple's maid will be at the station to meet you, and I shall be there too, if I possibly can. If you can let Mary Kemp know that you have heard from me, do. It will explain my not writing to her, but she shall hear to-morrow.

'Very sincerely yours,
'JOHN HERVEY.'

Thoughts of Jessie were for the moment chased from my mind as though they had never been; and no wonder. I had but one hour to prepare myself. Go, of course I must. The hopes of comfort which I had held out to Mrs Weir were a claim upon me, putting aside every consideration of early kindness. When anxiety for Jessie again presented itself, I could only determine to write to her. I went to Roger and consulted him, talking over what should be done in my absence, and settling nothing, because I did not imagine I could be detained more than a few days. Then I packed up my small box, wrote a line to Mary Kemp, ran up to Jessie's room, and finding her in bed, sat down and said all I could think of, and forgot everything I most wished to remember, except that I did beg her to keep clear of Mrs Price; and, at nearly the last moment, examined my purse, found I had not sufficient money for my journey, and had a long, tiresome business in explaining to William—for I never mixed my accounts with Roger and Jessie—what I should want; and, at length, just as the clock struck nine, found myself driving into Hove, on my way to London. Roger would have gone with me, but I would not allow it. I had travelled alone when I came back from my visit to Mrs Mason, a year or two before, and knew what I was to do,—and for us both to have been away from the farm would have been extremely inconvenient. He was most affectionate and understanding, and begged me to write the very moment I arrived, that they might have a letter the next morning.

All railway journeys are very much alike, unless there is the pleasant variety of breaking your limbs or being crushed to death, and my journey was in no way remarkable, except that I had very silent companions, who gave me a sufficient opportunity for meditation. We reached London at 3.25 precisely. Mrs Temple's maid, whom I knew by sight, was standing on the

platform of the station, and behind her was John Hervey. He greeted me as though we had not met for weeks.

'A glad sight, Ursie! I began to think whether you would come; but you are always to be depended on. Of course you are going at once to Wimpole Street?'

'Yes, I hope so; but I must have a few words with you first. What shall we do with Andrews?'

'Leave her with your box and the cab till you are ready. She won't mind waiting. These are strange times, Ursie.'

John gave his directions, which Andrews seemed to think quite natural, and then turned aside with me. We sat down for an instant, but I could not bear that, and we paced the platform.

'Now, tell me,' I said; 'what is the true state of the case?'

'I can't make out, neither can the doctors; that is why we have sent for you. Mrs Temple insists upon it that Mrs Weir's mind is quite gone, she really thinks so, and is frightened. The doctors say "No;" and I should say "No," as far as business is concerned. She had some affairs to settle with me yesterday, and was very fairly collected and sensible. But she cries all day, eats nothing, and every now and then answers so strangely that really it is difficult to believe that she is sane.'

'But I don't see what I am to do,' I said.

'She wants a soothing influence; that is what Dr Green declares. You know I came to London yesterday. I saw him then at Mrs Temple's; he wanted to find out from me what kind of state she was in for business. Afterwards, I had a private talk with him, and put him up to a good deal which he had no notion of before. He felt that Mrs Weir was not in good hands; but there was no moving her. At last a bright thought struck me, and I mentioned you. He caught at the notion, and Mrs Temple came, and it was proposed. She set herself against it, as you may imagine. I think her manner was quite sufficient to show the doctor what she really is, and he was more determined; and, at last, he carried his point.'

'So, I am come quite against Mrs Temple's wish,' I said.

'Not that entirely. Dr Green frightened her at last into thinking that you were likely to be her best friend. You will find her tolerably civil. She is quite a different person to me, so gracious, I don't know where I am when I am speaking to her. Yet wishing much to have you here, I would not trust to her writing, in spite of her promises, so I proposed to do it myself, and she was quite willing, which was odd enough, only she has

just now taken up the line of not having a voice in any arrangement. I fancy she thinks it safer as putting away all responsibility. That was why I wrote you that scrawl from Dr Green's house. He waited to make some memorandums of things I had told him, and took me back there for the purpose. I was terribly afraid it would be too late for the post, he kept me talking so till the last minute. But you are come, Ursie, and the load isn't half so heavy.'

That was natural enough ; for a very large share of it had been put upon me by this hurried explanation. The doctor, and Mrs Temple, and John Hervey—they all looked to me, it seemed, and a more ignorant, inexperienced being in such matters there could not be.

However, there is nothing like seeing no means of escape from a difficulty, and having been brought into my present position by God's Providence, I trusted that He would enable me to do my duty in it, kindly and bravely.

'I shall not go with you to Wimpole Street,' said John. 'I shall see as little of you as possible, only perhaps I shall call to-morrow ; after that, indeed, I must go home. It won't do to make Mrs Temple think there is anything like a plan between us, though what it could be about is more than I can tell. But I know she is always suspicious of something wrong, when two people agree in opposing her. Whatever you do, Ursie, must be done by yourself, with Dr Green's sanction. He will side with you, I am sure. And if there is any notion of removing Mrs Weir from Mrs Temple's care, all the servants will take your part, for they are tired out, so Andrews tells me, with having her there. The young woman who took Jessie's place went away when they left Stonecliff.'

'Remove Mrs Weir,' I said ; 'but where?—what is to be done with her?'

'I can't tell ; no one can tell, Ursie ; it all rests upon you.' Very poor comfort, indeed ! But there was real help in John's hearty sympathy, which I felt I was sure of under all circumstances. He put me into the cab with Andrews. I had only time to say, hoping to please him, 'Mary has your message,' and he nodded his thanks just as we were driving off.

We rattled through the streets at a quick pace, but I wished it had been quicker. I was beginning to feel painfully nervous. Andrews, knowing I had only been once in London before, pointed out all that was worth seeing, but I scarcely saw any-

thing;—only every moment I thought the cab was going to stop, and then my heart stopped too, and went on at an increased rate afterwards, to make up, I suppose, for lost time. The thundering rap at the door was speedily answered. My box was taken out, the cabman paid, and I was ushered into the house.

‘Wait here,’ said Andrews, opening the dining-room door, ‘and I will tell Mrs Temple you are come.’ The room was dingy; it had a very lodging-house look, for Mrs Temple had only taken a part of the house for a few weeks. I thought of Dene, and the Heath, and Stonecliff, and pictured to myself what Mrs Weir’s feelings must be, shut up in this London prison. Folding-doors divided the dining-room from an apartment at the back of the house. As I sat thinking, a low moaning sound came through the crevice, and soon I heard a voice—Mrs Temple’s voice—not quite so harsh as usual, but evidently striving against impatience. Still the moaning continued. At last I heard Mrs Temple say, ‘If you will only do what the doctor tells you—but you can’t have anything you wish, aunt, till you do.’ And poor Mrs Weir, for it could be no one else, was silent for a few seconds, and then Mrs Temple left her and came into me, and the moaning went on as before.

Mrs Temple was changed since I last saw her. She had passed through a good deal of trouble, and much of her stateliness of manner was gone, it was turned into irritability. But to me she was quite civil; I felt, at once, that, owing to the pressure of circumstances, I should have but little difficulty in obtaining and keeping an independent position, if only I was not afraid to decide and act upon my decision.

She thanked me for coming,—coldly,—but still I was thanked, and then she began to explain her view of Mrs Weir’s case. It may be expressed in a few words. Her aunt’s mind, she said, was quite broken down, and nothing remained to be done but to put her under strict medical care. The object in sending for me was, that as I had known Mrs Weir so long, I might prepare her for this necessary step, and induce her to submit to it gently.

The two ideas seemed to me inconsistent. If Mrs Weir was in a state in which by reasoning she could be brought to submission, her mind certainly could not be quite broken down. But I was not going to commit myself in an argument before I had had an opportunity of forming a judgment, and I begged at once to be allowed to go to Mrs Weir.

‘Presently. My aunt must not be taken by surprise,’ was the answer; but I repeated my request, ‘If I may but be allowed, ma’am, I should like,’ I said, ‘to see Mrs Weir in her natural state, as I cannot suppose that, in her present condition, any person’s presence would have much effect upon her.’ And as I made a movement towards the folding-door, Mrs Temple no longer opposed me.

I found Mrs Weir sitting in a small, darkened bedroom, close to the fire, wrapped up in shawls,—her eyes fixed, and a settled melancholy in her features. I had often seen her so before, but only for a short time. ‘Now,’ Mrs Temple whispered to me, ‘she is always so, except when she is crying.’ I went up to her and spoke, and she looked at me, and answered, quite recognising me, but not as if she was surprised, or pleased, or in any way excited by seeing me; and presently, as I said something to Mrs Temple, thinking to attract her attention, she began again the moaning sound which I had heard through the folding-doors. Mrs Temple pointed to a tray on which lay the untasted dinner, and observed, ‘There is no making her eat, she has tasted nothing all day.’ I did not make a direct reply, for I felt it must be bad for Mrs Weir to be talked of helplessly as a third person, so I addressed her naturally.

‘Dear ma’am,’ I said, ‘your dinner is ready and growing cold; suppose you were to move your chair, and come to the table, and if we were to draw up the blind, there would be a little more light. It is such a dark afternoon, and London is not so bright as Stonecliff, is it?’

It seemed to me as though the poor lady was quite unused to be spoken to cheerfully. She turned towards me with a kind of wonder, and when I said, ‘Now, ma’am!’ and moved her chair a little, she made no objection, but suffered me to wheel it round.

Mrs Temple put in a word. ‘Well, aunt! I am glad to see you do as the doctor tells you.’

Mrs Weir looked up pleadingly, ‘I don’t want to eat, Ursula; only they will be angry.’

‘Oh, dear ma’am!’ I said, ‘no one will be angry, and you need not eat at all, unless you fancy it.’

‘You are wrong, Miss Grant, quite wrong,’ exclaimed Mrs Temple, ‘she must eat.’

‘Mrs Weir likes little odd things, at odd times, I know, ma’am,’ I said. ‘I dare say she doesn’t fancy her dinner just

now. Should you like to hear how long I have been on my journey, ma'am?' I added, addressing Mrs Weir again; and without waiting for an answer, I went on, in the old fashion, telling my story. I saw that Mrs Temple thought me nearly as much out of my senses as Mrs Weir could be, for I described every little trifle, in a manner so minute and particular, as to a person in an ordinary state of mind must have seemed little short of absurd.

But I gained my point. Mrs Weir listened, and at last said of her own accord, 'You have been a long time without eating, Ursula, are you not hungry?'

I was terribly afraid of taking a liberty, but I ventured to say, 'If I might be allowed to have a biscuit, ma'am, I think I should like it.'

A plate of biscuits was on the table, Mrs Temple pushed it towards me, she could do no less, and then I went a step further. 'These are such very nice biscuits, dear ma'am,' I said; 'quite like those we used to have at Dene; don't you remember them?' I handed her the plate, and she took one, not from liking or wanting it, but I had touched her curiosity. She would not try a second time, but the spell was a little broken; she felt that she could eat; her existence was not quite so unnatural. For that, I had little doubt, was the secret of her morbid and melancholy silence. She had been treated as though unlike every other person, unable to determine or think for herself, and requiring authority to control her weakness of mind, and at length the evil which was to be averted was actually almost produced. I do not mean to say that there were not circumstances which aggravated the misery of her state, or that it was one which might not easily be mistaken; a very little observation showed me that Mrs Weir had gone many degrees back in her condition as a rational being since I last saw her at Stonecliff; but I still believed that the mischief was more in the management than in herself. I question whether any of us, even in the soundest state of mind, if told we were in danger of losing our reason, and treated accordingly, would not finally be brought to the point of insanity; and Mrs Temple, partly from impatience, partly from wrong judgment, had allowed herself to speak of Mrs Weir, before her, in a way which so strongly implied her having no power of judgment upon any point, that Mrs Weir herself believed it, and even alluded to her own state as one which must end in a still stricter control.

I am not going to detail every little thing that Mrs Weir did or said in this our first interview, or every method I took to shake her from her morbidness; it would be only tiresome; and, moreover, I have no such faith in my own knowledge in these matters, as to be at all sure that I acted always judiciously. On the contrary, as I sat with her that afternoon trying all kinds of experiments, sometimes succeeding, and very often failing, I was more than once inclined to think that I was going on a wrong system; or that, at any rate, if my efforts were based on a right foundation, they were attempted too late to be of use. Between seven and nine o'clock Mrs Weir went back to her old moaning state, only now and then stopping to cry bitterly, and say that she had neglected all her duties, that God would never love her, and that every one had left her; and then wandering off into some strange fancies, in which I, who knew her so well, could trace an association of ideas of things which had struck her in her reading, especially in the Bible,—all connected with her over-scrupulousness of conscience,—but which, certainly, to any person hearing only the disjointed sentences, would have sounded very much like the dreamings of a bewildered mind.

It was a sad, sad evening. When I saw Mrs Weir asleep, about half-past eleven, quiet and peaceful for the first time for so many hours, I could scarcely have grieved if I had been told that she was never to wake again.

CHAPTER LXIII.

MRS WEIR rose very late the next day. I saw John Hervey in the morning, and heard that he was to leave London in the afternoon. He was in a great hurry, and we said only a few words about Mrs Weir. He begged me to stay as long as I could, and promised to ask Mary Kemp to help Jessie with advice as to how to manage things at Sandcombe. I did not tell him how earnestly I wished Mary could give advice upon other and more important matters. Before he left me I sent an affectionate message to Mary, and told John I was glad he was going back to her, and he owned that it would be a comfort. It was pleasant to think that there were at least two

persons in the world likely to be happy that day. Mrs Temple kept herself aloof from me, and it was awkward enough in the morning, for I did not know where to sit or what to do; but after Mrs Weir was dressed, and when Dr Green had paid his visit, I was told that I was to remain in Mrs Weir's room, and I accordingly took my work there, and also finished a letter I had begun to Jessie. Mrs Weir was not much better than when I first saw her. She sat by the fire, as on the preceding day, not working or employing herself; but, following out my idea of taking everything naturally, I made no remark upon this, but only told her that I had to send a letter home, and hoped she would not think I was taking a liberty in writing it in her room; and then I left her for a while to herself.

Perhaps it was a good thing upon the whole that I was hurried and interrupted in my letter to Jessie; it made what I said more forcible, and prevented me from enlarging upon facts which might have irritated her. All I could say was that I had noticed some things which had made me unhappy and uneasy, because I could not understand them, that if I did her injustice in thinking she had anything upon her mind, she must forgive me; but that I earnestly entreated her, if she had, to tell me what it was, that at least I might comfort her, even if I could not advise her; and then I mentioned what I had heard and observed on the night of the party. I said nothing about her telling Roger, for I knew I should only have a vague answer, and that it never would be done; but I did hope that she might possibly place confidence in me. I concluded very affectionately, and assured her that her happiness and Roger's would alone have induced me to enter upon the subject.

I don't think I had much hope of obtaining a satisfactory answer, but I had eased my conscience, and I was then able to give my undivided attention to Mrs Weir. I must add, however, that I enclosed a note to Roger, telling him all the particulars he would want to know, besides the few facts I had written on the preceding evening, and, adding, that my letter to Jessie was on a little business, and I did not wish him to see it. That was, to my mind, the safest way of dealing with a reasonable being like Roger, who must know that cases might arise in which things could be said to his wife which could not be mentioned to him.

Before the close of that day I saw clearly that I could not hope to return to Sandcombe as soon as I had intended; at least if I was to be of any permanent use to Mrs Weir. Dr Green

thought her better, more interested and collected in manner, when he talked to her ; but he said, what we all knew, that anything like recovery would be a work of time. He told me, when I happened to see him alone, that he saw I was exercising a good influence, and he begged me to stay. He said the same to Mrs Temple afterwards, but she would not second his words. The moment she felt a little less anxious, the old jealousy and dislike began to return. John Hervey, before he left me, had promised to see Mr Macdonald and obtain from him the information which I had failed to extort about Mr Weir, as we both agreed that we must get Miss Milicent back at all hazards, as soon as she could leave her father. I sat in Mrs Weir's room all the morning, but in the afternoon I left for about an hour, and went out. The change was desirable for her and for me. She did not like my leaving her, which I thought a good sign. Mrs Temple gave me a commission for a knitting-box, and I contrived that she should talk about it before Mrs Weir, and made some difficulty in the matter of choice, merely to prolong the conversation. I wanted to let a breath of fresh air into the shut-up mind. Afterwards, when I returned, I brought three or four boxes to look at. Mrs Weir did not seem to remark them when I laid them near her, but when Mrs Temple had made her choice, she asked to see it, and said it was pretty, and the words were like music to me. At the time when I had noticed, the evening before, that her spirits began to fail, and her mind to grow weak and confused, I begged Andrews to let me have my tea, and, seeing me enjoy it, Mrs Weir was persuaded to take a little herself, and I am sure it did her good. She kept up much longer, and liked, I saw, to hear me talk ; and when at length she grew tired and began to cry, and say strange wandering things, I stopped her, by proposing to read a Psalm to her, and then the maid came and she went to bed. But how long was this state of things to last? and what could I decide upon doing?

I worried myself with the question at night, and in the morning felt how worse than vain and useless had been my perplexity.

Three letters were brought to me ; one from Jessie, one from John Hervey, and a third from Miss Milicent. Jessie's was opened first, and with a trembling hand.

‘MY DEAREST URSIE,—It is very kind in you to write to me, and if you were here, perhaps, I might be able to talk to you, for I

am not very happy, but you know I cannot express myself in a letter; I have not been taught how; and I dare say I shall do very well, and when things are gone by there is not much good in saying anything about them. I have had a bad headache all day. Roger is gone to Hove. Esther broke a glass bottle this morning. Two of the little chicks are dead, we cannot think how. I am, your very affectionate sister,

‘JESSIE GRANT.’

Little comfort, indeed, there was in that! The words ‘not very happy’ went to my heart. But writing was evidently useless. I had forgotten that Mrs Weir had taught me to express myself easily and correctly, and that Jessie had had no teaching at all. To think of gaining her confidence by letter was like seeking to obtain entrance into a blocked-up house. I turned to John Hervey’s letter; a feeling, which I could not explain, made me keep Miss Milicent’s to the last.

‘DEAR URSIE,—Mr Weir is lying ill at a little inn, at a place called Andely, in Normandy; that will be Miss Milicent’s address. I can get nothing out of Mr Macdonald, but I begin shrewdly to suspect that he and Captain Price have money embarked in the same speculations as Mr Weir, and that the object in keeping Miss Milicent there is to persuade her to throw her little fortune into it, which she is as likely as not to do. I hope some one will be able to interfere, though I don’t see how it is to be done, unless she can be brought back to England. I only saw Mary for a minute last night; she is very well, and will be much cheered by news I have had. I trust you are getting on well. In haste, very sincerely yours,

‘JOHN HERVEY.’

That was easy to comprehend, except, what did he mean by the news which had cheered Mary?

Miss Milicent’s letter was less scrawling than usual: the date was Andely:—

‘DEAR URSIE GRANT,—I have had two letters from you, both at one time. French people don’t trouble themselves much with the post. My father is very ill, and I can’t come home anyhow. We left Paris about a month ago, and have been at a great many places since, but now my father is so ill, we can’t move about. He has a fever; the doctor, I think, says he is better, but he talks odd French, and as I am not well up in the

language, I don't always understand him. I wish my governess had taught me French better, but she didn't know I should go abroad. If my father doesn't get better, he must get worse; that is why I should be glad to have a friend here, but there is not any woman I know in France who would come; indeed, I don't take to women generally, and have made most friends with men. If my mother's trustees, who are always troublesome, were here, I should like to talk to them. There are ways of making money in France which there are not in England. My mother would do well to think of this. Perhaps, if you were to talk to her about it, it might rouse her up. I always found that when we settled up accounts, she put herself more in a fuss than at other times. I like French ways, they are so independent. The other day I sat down on a box at the railway station and mended the braid of my dress, and nobody looked at me. I sit up with my father at night; it is very lonely. I am sorry Matilda Temple worries my mother so much; I always knew she would. My father might have done without me at Paris, but he could not here, so it is all well I came. He was very kind, and took me travelling about to see Normandy. We walked a good deal, which is how he caught the fever. I think when he gets better we may go into Brittany. He will want change, but if I am to stay with him I must have that money my aunt left me put into my own hands. I mean to write to the lawyer about it. I don't think my father is so well to-day. You will see why I can't come home. Mr Macdonald wrote to my father lately on a little business; he says he often sees you and your pretty sister-in-law. People said she would have married him if she had not married your brother. But she has made the best choice, for Roger Grant is an honest man. I keep my eyes and ears open, as is necessary, and I am never taken in by any one. Good-bye, Ursie Grant: you must quite see why I have done right, and I shall be obliged to you to write and tell me so.

'I am, your sincere friend,

'MILICENT WEIR.

'P.S.—I only want to be in England for a doctor for my father. I never was down-hearted before, but this is a very out-of-the-way place. I shall write to my mother, and tell her about my father, and that will explain all. He has been talking of her, and sent her a message.'

I had this letter open in my hand, when Mrs Temple knocked at my bedroom door and immediately entered. Her quick eye caught the handwriting directly.

‘You have had a letter, I see, from Miss Weir.’

‘Yes, ma’am; she informs me Mr Weir is very ill, and says that she intends writing to Mrs Weir. May I ask if she has done so? Miss Milicent tells me that her father has been talking of Mrs Weir, and has sent her a message.’ I came to the point at once; it was the only way in dealing with Mrs Temple, to take her unprepared.

She hesitated, stammered, began a negative, then suddenly changing her tone, said, confidentially, ‘I think,—yes, I believe, there may be a letter; but in Mrs Weir’s present state, it will not do to alarm her.’

‘Perhaps, ma’am,’ I said, ‘being alarmed may do her good.’

‘Oh no! impossible. With her shattered nerves, quiet is the one important point. I could not answer it to Dr Green.’

It was an opportunity for being bold, and I was resolved to take advantage of it. ‘If you will excuse my saying it, ma’am,’ I replied, ‘it seems to me that quiet has been tried upon Mrs Weir already, without much effect. What comes in the ordering of Providence may be better for her than any plan of ours.’

‘But Mr Weir is ill, you say; surely you don’t intend to take upon yourself the responsibility of telling Mrs Weir. If you do, I put the case out of my hands entirely. I will have nothing to do with it,—nothing. It is the height of imprudence; I must send immediately for Dr Green.’

‘I have no wish to tell Mrs Weir anything, ma’am,’ I said; ‘but if I were left to myself I should take what seems to be sent in a natural way; and as Miss Milicent has written, I should give the letter.’

‘Milicent’s letter!—and with a message in it!—Mrs Weir will be frantic. She will say instantly that she must go.’

‘And I should let her go, ma’am.’

Mrs Temple turned away from me, and walked to the other end of the room. Then facing me suddenly, she said, ‘And who is to go with her?’

I made no answer, for I could think of none.

‘You see!’ exclaimed Mrs Temple, ‘it is an impossibility; it has been so from the beginning. People have taken upon them,

I know, to condemn my course of action ; things have been said, —very unkind things,—unjustifiable ;—and she fixed her eyes upon me,—‘but the moment any other course is proposed, insurmountable difficulties are discovered. Mrs Weir is but a child, and must be treated as such. She is worse than a child, indeed ; there can be only one end to this sad business. Miss Grant, you are but playing with Dr Green, in pretending that you can do anything. You know as well as I do how long this evil has been going on ; the sooner Mrs Weir is placed under strict control, the better it will be for herself and for her friends.’

I had scarcely listened to the greater part of this tirade, my thoughts had been centred on one point. When Mrs Temple had finished I made no reply, beyond remarking that I hoped the case was not quite so sad ; and assuring Mrs Temple that I would take no responsibility on myself without Dr Green’s permission, I begged her to excuse my leaving her, and went downstairs to Mrs Weir.

As I sat in the room working, and trying to talk, my mind was revolving the difficult answer to Mrs Temple’s question. It was one for which I felt I must be prepared before I could urge my wish with regard to the letter. Certainly to tell Mrs Weir that her husband was dangerously ill, and then to shut her up as before, would be merely driving her frantic. But on the other hand, to keep the intelligence from her, and at last, perhaps, have to inform her that he was dead, was a probability frightful to contemplate in its effects. Mrs Temple’s objection I believed to be based principally upon an obstinate belief in her own system. In Mrs Weir’s present state it could no longer be a point of importance to keep her in the house. She was an incessant anxiety, and medical expenses were running away with any advantage that might be expected from sharing housekeeping. The one natural way of solving the difficulty would be to offer to go to France myself ; and a short time before, I should have proposed it without a moment’s hesitation. But through all this painful time of trouble on Mrs Weir’s account I had one thought, more painful, more anxious, than any other,—it concerned Jessie. To picture her as unhappy, awoke a feeling which I scarcely knew to exist. She had become dearer to me than I was at all aware of. Her gentleness had won upon me. Her very ignorance and seeming helplessness had formed a tie between us ; above all, she was Roger’s wife, and now that the

first bitterness of disappointment was over, that was a claim upon my affection which I could not but feel. I longed to be at Sandcombe again. Since the ice was broken, I thought I might work wonders with her,—console, advise, guard her,—above all, bring her to openness with Roger. If left to herself, I had fears of continued deception, thoughtlessness, extravagance, weak yielding to Mrs Price's influence; all likely to lead to irretrievable mischief between her and Roger. Unhappy! so early in her married life! It seemed that I must go back to her. But it was not to be. Dr Green came before I could make up my mind what was to be done. I saw him alone, and put Mrs Weir's case before him. He took my view. There was a visible improvement since my arrival; and he was inclined to think that it would be wiser to act according to the natural course of events. 'No excitement,' he said, 'could be worse than the dreary melancholy into which Mrs Weir had fallen. Of course, I was prepared to go with her, if she wished to join her husband.' He took it as the simplest, easiest thing in the world—as though I had no claim, or interest, or occupation, apart from Mrs Weir. I believe he rather imagined—so little did he know of my circumstances—that I was accustomed to wait upon and manage persons whose minds were diseased. I did not contradict him, because I felt it would be hopeless to make him see as I saw; and when I hesitated, he was so surprised, and so hasty, that my courage quite failed me in talking to him, and I only stood still and listened to what he said.

Mrs Temple came in, and the question was discussed with her, and being thoroughly provoked, she naturally threw all the burden upon me. 'The idea was to her,' she owned, 'quite preposterous; but she could only bow to Dr Green's opinion. As I advocated the scheme, and had so much confidence in my own powers, I was the fit person to carry it out. She wished it to be understood that it was entirely against her judgment, and from this moment she repudiated all responsibility as regarded Mrs Weir. As for me, I was very young; I had no experience; I was perfectly ignorant of the French language; I was weakly indulgent in my treatment of Mrs Weir; but it was useless to say anything; in fact, all had been said that could be; but no one considered her opinion.' I can't go on any further. Mrs Temple talked for at least five minutes without pause, scarcely stopping to take breath. At the end of this time, Dr Green, who had become perfectly cool, whilst listening to her, remarked

quietly, that I had shown so much judgment already, he could not believe but that I should be equal to any emergency. Mrs Temple left the room haughtily, and he went on with some more inquiries and directions concerning Mrs Weir.

But I was determined to make no hasty engagement. I begged to be allowed a day to consider. 'I was by no means prepared,' I said, 'to go abroad.' Dr Green thought that money was the difficulty, and assured me he would undertake that I should be sufficiently recompensed. But this was not in my mind for a moment; I only wished to see what was right. As I stood there, I began weighing the conflicting claims, especially considering whether it would be possible to find some one to take my place, when Mrs Temple rushed into the room in alarm. Mrs Weir had learned the news—her state of agitation was terrific, and we must go to her directly. She looked very much alarmed, and well she might be, for in her irritation and perverseness, she had pretended to misunderstand Dr Green's intentions; and wishing, as she said, to have the business over, had given Mrs Weir Miss Milicent's letter without any word of preparation or kindness.

I will not attempt to describe the scene we had to go through in consequence; it would be too painful. Mrs Weir was thrown back to a state much worse than that in which I had found her. She could be calmed only by strong opiates. I had no longer any doubt where my duty lay. Leave her I could not, even to go back to Sandcombe for a day to see Jessie, and satisfy my mind about her. The journey to France was a last alternative, but it must be tried, unless I wished to have it upon my conscience that, by refusing to go, I had forgotten the kindness shown me in past years, and the hopes of assistance I had lately held out, and aided in shattering the little remaining strength of Mrs Weir's mind. I was the person commissioned to tell her that she was going, and that I would accompany her. It was very touching to hear her—not at first taking in the possibility—saying, 'She was a prisoner; she was not fit to go about; and she was losing her senses, her niece had often told her so. But she should wish to go; and Mr Weir, she thought, had sent her a message; only, she might have dreamt about him. And he was her husband, and God would wish her to attend to him; but then she couldn't go. Would God be angry with her because she didn't?' And, at last, holding my hand very tightly, and saying, again and again, 'I love you, Ursula; you are very kind

to me, and you won't be angry with me. I love you very much; but I am losing my senses, and they will shut me up, and that will be best for me.' And then crying so bitterly, that it made my heart ache to hear her. I began to feel at last as though we were really in a prison, and that nothing would go well with us till we were out of it.

Such an amount of business as I had then upon my hands would have made my brain nearly as confused as Mrs Weir's but for Dr Green's help. I think he saw plainly now how matters stood, and was prepared to find Mrs Temple interposing difficulties, which it would be his business to overcome. The first thing he did was to find a trusty maid who understood French, and to put her under my authority. He gave me instructions himself as to passports, and railroads, and steamers, and hotels, and gave me full directions as to any medical care which Mrs Weir might require. Mrs Temple was seldom referred to, which I was sorry for, since it gave her a more bitter feeling against me, and induced her to worry her husband, who, in his good-nature, and being rejoiced, I suspect, to be rid of Mrs Weir, made himself very useful in messages and inquiries. We had what Miss Milicent would have called a very trying time; and, in the midst of all this external worry, I had my own secret anxieties which could be mentioned to no one. I wrote again to Jessie, urging her, by every argument and motive that I could possibly suggest, to talk openly to Roger as she would to me, and to throw herself entirely into his hands; and, feeling in my own mind that my words would be without effect, I did what, under other circumstances, I should have shrunk from. I wrote to Mrs Kemp, begging her, as she loved me, to keep her eye upon Jessie, and to interfere, if necessary, to guard her from the Dene intimacy, even at the risk of making Roger angry, and telling her that I had very serious reasons for this request. My words, I knew, would be open to misconstruction, and might increase Mrs Kemp's prejudice, but she was honest-hearted and very kind, and would act upon them. That was all I cared for at the moment. To Roger himself I wrote, chiefly upon business matters. He would understand, I knew, the pressing claims which had forced me so suddenly to leave all my duties. It would never cross his mind to blame me because he was inconvenienced. 'I hoped,' I said, 'I should return soon, but in the meantime, I thought that Jessie would manage tolerably well, if he could, for a little while, let her have some additional help in

the kitchen, so that she might chiefly have to superintend and give orders.' I said this particularly, because he was beginning to be anxious about her health. Next spring there might be a little Jessie, and I knew this fact would make him anxiously careful about her, and think she ought not to do anything; whereas occupation would be the greatest safeguard she could have. I sent, also, a few lines to William, that he might not think himself forgotten; and I wrote to John Hervey, telling him all I thought he would wish to know, and adding a kind word about Mary. When I had despatched all these letters, I felt that my English business was done. I had then only to think of France and Miss Milicent, to whom I sent a few lines, telling her she might expect her mother very shortly, but that I could give her no fixed day for our arrival. Louise, the new maid, however, assured us that Andely was a respectable town, and we should be sure to find accommodation there. What was to be done afterwards depended much on Mr Weir's state.

CHAPTER LXIV.

WE crossed to Havre on a calm night. Mrs Weir bore the journey to Southampton better than I anticipated; but she was very tired when we got on board the steamer, and I persuaded her to go to bed immediately. I found her docile as a child, and, generally speaking, with a clear comprehension of all that was being done and said; only, now and then, especially when suffering from any kind of physical exhaustion, the nervous excitement returned, and she would talk hurriedly and incoherently. When this happened, I took no notice, except by giving her a soothing draught, recommended by Dr Green, which quieted her for a time, and, indeed, put her into a kind of torpid state, but he had urged me on no account to use it often. 'His hope was,' he said, 'that change of scene, and absence of mental worry, would, by degrees, in a measure restore her nerves, without any such assistance. She was likely to prove a good sailor. If she was not, it would do her no harm.' The matter was indifferent to him, but it was not so to me, for, as I had never been on the sea before, I had great misgivings on my own account, and, feeling very dizzy and uncomfortable, it was no slight relief

to me to see Mrs Weir asleep in her berth, under the care of the new maid, Louise, and to be able to go on deck for a little fresh air myself. There were but few passengers, and scarcely any foreigners. No one came near me to interrupt me, and as long as I stayed on deck I really enjoyed myself. The sky was brilliant and cloudless; the sea so calm that one star was reflected in the water as though it had been the moon. I was more at peace than I had been since I left Sandcombe. I was not, indeed, free from uneasiness, and that of a serious kind, but my home cares were necessarily, for the time being, put away, and the sense of powerlessness is sometimes a great rest. As it grew late, I went down into the cabin. A berth had been provided for me just above Mrs Weir's, and I clambered into it and slept, not a comfortable sleep, for the incessant noises of the ship disturbed me greatly, and whenever I woke certain very disagreeable sensations reminded me that I had better not attempt to move. But there was something in the novelty which lessened discomfort, and a strange, awful, yet pleasureable feeling, in looking out of the port-hole upon the wide waste of waters gleaming in the moonlight. It carried me back in imagination to St Anne's Hill, and the times when I had looked from it upon the same sea, and thought it the image of eternity; and that unknown and endless existence seemed nearer to me than it had ever been before, for I felt that there was indeed but 'a step between me and death.' I woke very early, dressed myself quickly, and was prepared to wait upon Mrs Weir before Louise, who was but a bad sailor, was able to leave her berth. The luggage was trusted to her, so she went on deck to look after it, and I persuaded Mrs Weir to follow as soon as she could; but she shrank from the thought of strangers, and fancied it impossible to mount the narrow stairs. When at length I succeeded in persuading her, I regretted having done so, for the confusion was, to my inexperienced eye, hopelessly bewildering. We were just about to land, and some strange Frenchmen, with cocked hats, and swords, were on the deck, giving orders as if they were lords of every one, and people were calling from the shore, and answering from the ship, and rushing hither and thither, with boxes, bags, and trunks, and every now and then addressing me in sentences made up of two English words to six French ones. I could only obey Louise, who, at intervals, came up to us, saying, 'Sit still, sit still; don't be impatient,' and I should have sat there till night if I had not been told to move, and so, I think,

would Mrs Weir, for she seemed quite cowed by the bustle. How at last we got on shore, and found a carriage, and were placed in it, with our luggage, I have never been able to tell. I only know that we did manage everything, and without much difficulty, and that we were driven through some narrow streets to the hotel which Dr Green had recommended; and I know also that I could have been very much amused, that I was so indeed, at intervals; only I was so occupied in thinking of Mrs Weir. It came over me, I remember, as we turned away from the port, and I looked back upon the sea which separated me from England, that perhaps after all we had made a mistake.

And certainly there was some reason to fear it that afternoon. Mrs Weir was so tired and ill, it was useless to think of going on farther the same day, though we had landed about seven in the morning. Louise said she would require a rest of several days; but I was sure that a settled delay in one place would increase her illness, unless she was actually unable, from bodily weakness, to attempt the journey. I nursed her all the morning, just as I should have done in London, reading her to sleep, and talking till I was nearly worn out; and it was not till late in the afternoon that I could leave her for half-an-hour, just to walk round the town and see what the place was like. But even that half-hour did wonders for me,—it was better than sleep, or reading, or anything that could have been offered me to distract my thoughts. It was like a new fresh life. The quaintness, and prettiness, and strangeness of everything, were a perfect cordial to my spirits. I went back to the hotel with all kinds of absurd things to tell Mrs Weir, and feeling as though I had purchased a new book which I was sure would interest her; and by and by, greatly to my wonder, she made me push the sofa, on which she was lying, close to the window, that she might look out and see the curious things I had been talking about. Louise must have been quite surprised at my delight. She knew little about Mrs Weir, and France was her native country, though she had lived chiefly in England. To me the sight of Mrs Weir, pointing to a Normandy cap, worn by a peasant who passed underneath our windows, brought one of the most hopeful feelings I had ever experienced. Our next day's journey was by railway to Rouen. Dr Green had recommended our trying short distances, so as to avoid over-fatigue, and to give Mrs Weir an opportunity of becoming interested in the places we passed through. His advice was certainly wise, for on the second day Mrs Weir was so

roused by the novelty of everything, and so calmed by the thought that she was at length going to her husband, that she was at intervals quite as well as when I last saw her at Stone-cliff. We arrived at Rouen early, and with her usual unselfishness, she made a point of sending me out; and I am afraid I took advantage of the permission to stay longer than I ought to have done, as it was nearly dark when I returned. But I left Mrs Weir inclined to sleep, and Louise with her, so that I was not anxious; and really the beauty and strangeness of the place made me quite forget how time went. I should have been frightened at walking about in a foreign town by myself, so the mistress of the hotel very good-naturedly sent one of her little boys, who had learned to speak a few words of English, with me; and with his help, I made my way through numbers of narrow streets, looking into churches and public buildings as I went along, till I was in a maze of bewilderment and delight. All I really wanted was to have Roger with me, that I might now and then give vent to my excitement, and say, 'Do look, how beautiful! or how droll!' I believe I did catch hold of my little companion once or twice, to his great astonishment. One thing, though, I could not reconcile myself to, and that was the dirt. Yet even that was unlike English dirt; if it had been, I don't think I could have endured to stay in the place. But it had a look of its own, quite different from anything I ever noticed, or could have imagined,—a kind of suitability it was, which made me feel as though Rouen would not have been Rouen without it; and I laughed at it to myself as I walked along the street, and when I went back to the hotel, tried to forget it. As to the churches, I can't in the least describe properly the effect they had upon me. Having seen nothing but Compton church, and Hatton, except once, when being in London for a few days, I was taken to St Paul's and Westminster Abbey, they came upon me at first like buildings that could not belong to this world,—they were so vast and beautiful. Then as I hurried through them, such odd things struck my eye,—tawdry images, and little candles, and artificial flowers,—and such a very dirty pavement,—I was quite surprised. Neither did I know what to make of the people who were in them; some seemed very earnest at their prayers, and others were looking about all the while they were repeating them. I thought that, perhaps, I had better not try and form any opinion, for it was impossible in that short peep that I could understand about their religion. I should have

liked very much to stay and say my prayers in one of the churches myself, but I was afraid people would notice me; and I thought, too, that perhaps no one was allowed to do so except Roman Catholics. As I could not speak French, and my little companion was only able to understand short sentences, it seemed better to leave the matter.

We were to start from Rouen about twelve o'clock the next day, to go by railway to Gaillon, and from thence to Andely. What kind of place this Andely was I could not make out. Louise declared it was 'very well, very good,—I need not make myself to fidget,—we should get on beautiful.' But then she had adopted this tone about everything we had seen since we landed in France. Even the dirt of Rouen was in her eyes sacred. My chief comfort was that Mrs Weir was able to put up in a wonderful way abroad, with things which would have distressed her for days at home. The bodily fatigue, and the calmer state of her mind, caused her to sleep better; and this quieted her nerves. I was not going to allow myself to be anxious, for that would do no good; and moreover, I trusted implicitly to Louise. At the railway stations she managed everything; I only undertook the charge of Mrs Weir. So it was that the next day, when we were prepared to set off, I left the luggage in her care, and sent her to have it registered before Mrs Weir and I arrived. Greatly to my annoyance, I found her at the station gossiping with some friends whom she had met. I disliked the notion of her having any acquaintances; but I could not exactly find fault. She assured me everything was right, and I took my seat with Mrs Weir, leaving Louise to follow in a second-class carriage. I don't think a railway journey is ever pleasant; and it was provoking to find everything abroad so much like what it is in England. Mrs Weir had little to amuse her, and sat quiet, with that depressed air which I so much dreaded. I tried to attract her attention, but she did not care for the view, which was very pretty, though we passed through the country so quickly that the pleasure of looking at it was much lessened in consequence. We went along the banks of the Seine, which wound in and out so that we could not always tell on which side the railway was carried. A range of low hills bordered it on the left bank, and there were openings between them, showing glimpses of what I thought would be very lovely valleys; but wherever there was any cultivation, the country looked dreary from the absence of

hedgerows ; and there was a want of trimness in the way the land was farmed, which I was sure would shock Roger's eye. Besides, I did not at all like the little long strips of fields, like cottagers' gardens. It did not seem as though there could be any people in France holding the same place as Farmer Kemp, and William, and Roger. But there again, as it was with the churches, perhaps I was no judge about it. Louise told me that people in France are obliged to divide their property equally amongst all their children, or at least, I believe, the eldest son has two shares. The notion of an equal division pleased me at first, for it appeared just ; but when I thought it over, it seemed as if, in the end, the property which a person might have would be cut up, and the portions become less and less, until all would be poor together.

The distance to Gaillon was not great : when the train stopped, I got out quickly, collected the cloaks and shawls, helped Mrs Weir to alight, led her to a seat, and then looked up for Louise. She was standing quite calmly, waiting for I knew not what. The train rushed off. I went up to her, ' Louise, where is the luggage ?'

' Oh ! quite right,' was the reply, ' it is always right in France.' I turned away contentedly, but recollecting that we were not to stay at Gaillon all night, I went back, and asked where we were to find a carriage to take us on to Andely.

' It will come quite in time, don't trouble yourself, there is one in communication,' and Louise walked away from me, and began talking to a Frenchman. I was not satisfied, there was no sign of either carriage or luggage ; Mrs Weir was beginning to feel chilly, and in spite of the commendations of Louise, I felt in my own mind that a French railway station is not always as comfortable as an English one. I put a cloak round Mrs Weir, and then looked again at Louise, her countenance expressed the utmost consternation. She rushed up to me, wringing her hands. ' Ah ! the luggage ! the luggage ! it is gone, the stupid wretch, not to have known—not to have heard ! I told him.'

' Who ? what ?' I exclaimed. ' The luggage gone ? you told me it was all right.'

' Yes, right, it is right ; it was registered for Paris. It is gone there.'

I did not in the least understand, and it was some time before I could be made to do so. Louise, in her inexcusable carelessness,

had told one of her friends to have the luggage registered instead of attending to it herself. He had blundered, and thought from something she said, that she was going on to Paris : so the luggage had not been taken out at Gaillon, and whilst we were standing and quietly looking on, our boxes and bags were rushing away from us at the rate of twenty miles an hour. I believe what aggravated Louise more than her own folly, was my stupidity in not being able to make out why the registering was of such consequence. French railways were things I was only just beginning to comprehend. For the future, however, I felt I must exert myself, and learn to manage matters my own way, so I left Louise to meditate upon her provoking negligence, and explain to the station-master that he must telegraph for the luggage, and walked away to see what hope there might be of finding a carriage to take us on to Andely. A very tiny omnibus was standing at the station ; by it was an old, sunburnt, gray-headed Frenchman, dressed in a kind of blue smock-frock, with a long whip in his hand. My heart sank. Louise came up. 'Is that our carriage?' I asked.

'Oh ! yes, a very good carriage ; what can be expected better at a country station ? You have always omnibuses in England.'

Very true, but Mrs Weir was not accustomed to travel in them. The old man pointed to the vehicle, intending we should get in. Louise was about to do so, but I stopped her. 'I don't think it will do,' I said ; 'I don't think Mrs Weir can go in that thing, and no luggage, and not knowing what sort of place Andely is. She can't do it.' Misfortunes seemed to crowd upon me, and I could have found it in my heart to begin reproaching Louise again.

'You will find nothing else,' said Louise ; 'there is not a carriage to be had,' and she appealed to a man near her, who went forward and opened the omnibus door to assure me there was no alternative. There really was no time for deliberation. We might perhaps have slept at Gaillon, but if the luggage did not reach us, what should we do ? and at Andely, there would be Miss Milicent to help us. I did not suggest a difficulty to Mrs Weir, for I had found by experience that it was a bad plan, but going up to her, I said, 'There is a strange little carriage waiting for us, dear ma'am, I am afraid it won't be very comfortable ; but we shall soon be at Andely now, it is only a few miles.'

She was too tired and too depressed, even to answer me, but

taking up her travelling bag, she put her arm within mine and walked very slowly to the omnibus. I saw she moved feebly, and it struck me that perhaps after all we had better not go on, but when I just said to her, 'Suppose, ma'am, we ask if we can have beds here?' her face of distress made me feel that it would not do to suggest it. All that tiresome railway journey, and the delay had given her time for thought, which was the worst thing she could have. We drew near the omnibus. I was about to help Mrs Weir in. A Frenchman's head peeped out, then another, and another; we were actually to travel eight inside. And the men were stout farmers, a greater perplexity to me than anything I had yet seen in France, my notion of a Frenchman having always been that of a skeleton, kept alive by thin soup and sour bread. It was not chilly in the omnibus; I let down the window to admit a little fresh air, and my French neighbour immediately drew it up again, and when I appealed to Louise to explain that it was bad for Mrs Weir, she said it was no use, French people did not live in draughts like the English. We waited at the station, I suppose for outside passengers, till I was quite tired, but at last the horse neighed, and the driver smacked his whip, and shouted and yelled, and off we set jolting over the rough road.

Mrs Weir's pale face of endurance made my heart sad; the heat was becoming very oppressive, and I had a dread of her growing faint. We had gone but a very little way, when we stopped at the bank of a river, the Seine, as Louise informed me. What was to be done then? Even Mrs Weir turned her head to look, but the old driver took it very composedly. A ferry-boat was waiting for us; omnibus and horse, and Frenchmen, and ourselves, by dint of pushing and pulling, and shouting, were all put on board, and launched forth into the middle of the river. How odd I thought it, how my mind turned to Sandcombe, and Roger, and Jessie, and Mary Kemp, and John Hervey, when I looked on the broad river, and then on my novel companions, and remembered that I was in the middle of the Seine, with Mrs Weir under my charge, I need not attempt to say. Louise had sunk from irritability to sullenness, and was pondering, I hope, with repentance, upon her carelessness. Mrs Weir was pale, and, I was afraid, frightened, for she held my hand very tight. The Frenchmen chattered fast, and at the highest pitch of their voices. There was no beauty in the river, nothing to divert one's thoughts from the unpleasant contemplation of the present and

the future. But the crossing was the work of a few minutes, and once more on dry land, on we went again, jogging over a narrow cross-road. Presently we stopped at a small farmhouse, and a disagreeable looking man, not a gentleman, though dressed as if he meant to pass for one, came out. There was certainly no room in the inside, and I imagined there was not likely to be any on the outside; but he was bent upon having a place, and mounted to the top, much, I suspect, to the annoyance of the outside passengers, and certainly to ours, for the creakings and groanings of the poor little omnibus were alarming, and made Louise put her head out of the window and call out loudly to the driver, explaining to me afterwards in English, that she had told him we were all going to be cracked. I had calculated upon our having about five miles to travel, and the distance might not really have been more, but the sight of Mrs Weir's face made it appear double; and what was the more provoking, every now and then we came to what seemed the entrance to a village, but which proved to be nothing of the kind. Presently one of the Frenchmen muttered something in a tone which was evidently meant for the company at large, and pointed to the window. I looked out and saw on the right some ruined walls and a kind of castle on the top of a hill, but there was nothing very remarkable in it, and my heart just then was set upon finding a comfortable house, and not a ruined castle, so I paid but little attention to it. Soon afterwards we did really arrive at a village. I begged Louise to ask the name of the place. It was Little Andely, and as Mrs Weir heard the name she started up, drew her shawl round her, and taking hold of my hand tried to move, but we were to be disappointed again. Little Andely was not our place of destination. We saw passenger after passenger descend, and amongst them the ill-looking Frenchman, but our turn was not yet. We had still a longer distance to travel, and Mrs Weir was too tired to be excited, when at length we did reach a kind of town, with some streets, and a few shops, and decent-looking houses. We stopped at the door of a little inn. My first impulse was to rush in and ask for Miss Millicent, but alas! I had no French knowledge to help me, and I was obliged to trust to Louise. I had just helped Mrs Weir out of the omnibus, and paid the driver, when she came back utterly disconsolate.

‘No one knew anything of Miss Millicent, or Mr Weir, or any English; it was all a mistake, and we had left England for nothing.’

I was thunderstruck, I confess, but I would not show it. Mrs Weir clung to me trembling. I dreaded the effect of such news, but she did not seem to comprehend what was said.

'Take me to my husband, Ursula,' she murmured. 'Ask these good people where he is?'

Louise wished to explain, but I motioned to her to be silent, and led Mrs Weir into the inn. We entered a small coffee-room, decked out with prettily-painted walls, artificial flowers, and a marble slab for a table. It was much better than I had expected, but Mrs Weir could not remain there, and I told Louise that we must be shown up-stairs. A bright-looking French girl, with a very white cap, came forward to know what we wanted, and Louise followed her to see the rooms. Mrs Weir sat down on a bench. I heard her repeating some verses of the Psalms to herself, yet in rather a wandering way, and then suddenly she turned to me and said, 'My husband and Milicent will come soon, Ursula; you must tell them to come, then I shall go to bed.'

I hoped she would not expect any reply, but she did,—her eyes were fixed anxiously upon me, and I was obliged to say, 'I must go and find them, ma'am. If you will lie down on your bed for a little while, I will look for them.'

She trusted to me so implicitly, that she was satisfied in a moment, and my conscience almost reproached me for deception. Yet, what could I do? and I was sure that we could not be quite mistaken. Some intelligence we must obtain before long. Louise returned saying that 'the rooms were good—very good'—beautifully clean—quite like France; but there was rather a steep staircase to get to them. It was certainly steep, and very dirty too. So also was the passage, and it was a work of great difficulty to take Mrs Weir to her room; which, however, when we reached it, was tolerably comfortable. Mrs Weir lay down on the bed perfectly exhausted. I bathed her face with water, and gave her eau-de-Cologne; but the very first thing to be thought of was something in the way of refreshment, and I sent Louise to order some coffee for her directly, whilst I gently prepared her for the fact that Mr Weir was not in the house, and that further inquiries must be made respecting him. I found, as I had always done, that the shortest and simplest way of proceeding was the best. Mrs Weir, with all her eccentricities, was still to be governed by reason and truth, and I said to her that 'God had sent her a trial, for that we had made a

mistake in coming to this inn. Mr Weir was at some other place, but we should, I hoped, soon find out where. In the meantime she might know that she had done her duty in trying to join him. No doubt we should soon learn where he was. She was distressed, as I feared she might be, but to be told that she had done her duty was strengthening to her. She said to me, in a feeble voice, 'Yes, Ursula, I tried to do my duty; my niece told me it was not my duty, but you thought it was, and Dr Green too, and I am come. I think I will try to sleep; when you have found my husband you will wake me.'

Whatever the end might be, that was better than the mournful depression, and though a foreboding of sorrow came over me, I had no regret for the step we had taken. Finding Mrs Weir so quiet, I left her for a few minutes and went down-stairs.

CHAPTER LXV.

I FOUND Louise doing what I wished I had been able to do, asking questions which might lead to some information about Mr Weir. She told me that she could learn nothing except that, a few weeks before, two gentlemen, one French and the other English, with an English lady, had passed through the town, and slept there one night. No one seemed to know what had become of the English people, but the Frenchman was staying at a farm-house, some way beyond Little Andely. The clue was worth something. I recollected the displeasing-looking man who had been our fellow-passenger in the omnibus, and thought he might be the Frenchman alluded to. Most probably also I should find Mr Weir and Miss Milicent at the village through which we had passed; at any rate it was worth while to try. I asked if there was any carriage which would take Louise there; but we had arrived at a most unfortunate moment. A fair was being held at Vernon, a neighbouring town, and not a vehicle of any description was to be had, except the little railway omnibus. The old conducteur, as I found he was called, came to my assistance. 'He was going back,' he said, 'to the station, and should return. He would put Louise down at Little Andely, and call for her on his way back.' Nothing could be better, and I hastened up-stairs to Mrs Weir, to comfort her with the

intelligence, if necessary. I found her restless. She was overtired, and wanted her coffee. I would not tell her what we were going to do till she had taken it. The peasant girl brought it up, without milk, in three small cups,—also three liqueur glasses and a little of brandy. All were set down on the corner of a deal table. I could have laughed heartily at the arrangement, but the suggestion was good. I poured a teaspoonful of brandy into the coffee, without telling Mrs Weir what I was doing, and begged her to drink it like medicine. She was so docile, I seldom had any trouble with her on such points.

Very different from Louise ; when I proposed to her to go in the omnibus to Little Andely, she flatly refused. ‘It was too late,’ she said, ‘and no use. The English people were not there ; they would have been heard of if they were. She had been hired to wait upon Mrs Weir, not to obey me ; and she was very tired, and had a dreadful headache,—in fact, she felt quite ill ; and’—— I was not inclined to hear more. I had but a limited authority, and no time to exercise it, even if I had not felt that Louise, from her knowledge of the language, was in a great degree my mistress. The omnibus was at the door, and the conducteur would not wait. Mrs Weir, who had learned what we wished to do, was becoming roused and uneasy by the discussion and the delay. She urged me to go myself, and there was no alternative. Not disputing the point with Louise,—for a dispute is generally a loss, unless you have the power of enforcing obedience,—I departed. A few words of French I did know ; I had learned them from a conversation-book, which I had studied at intervals during our short journey ; and when I was set down at the door of a small inn in Little Andely, I was able to ask, though with what kind of pronunciation I will not say, ‘Y a-t-il des Anglais ici?’ My old friend, the conducteur, waited to hear the answer ; he knew my errand, and was interested in it. But the reply of the landlord of the inn was long, and utterly unintelligible. We stood looking at each other, making grimaces and signs. I opened my conversation-book. In my perplexity, I had a notion that if I could spell the English words to him he would understand them better, and I actually began pointing out the letters ; and then left off, laughing at my own stupidity, and again put the question, ‘Y a-t-il des Anglais ici?’ This time I had an English answer. The Frenchman from the farm-house made his appearance from some little salon near the door, and informed me that he spoke English well, and

that he could tell me everything. What did I want? As to speaking English well, the gentleman was under a mistake, but it was well enough for my purpose, and I inquired directly for Mr Weir. A change came over his countenance—distrust and uneasiness were shown. He began asking me questions, instead of replying to mine; but I would tell him nothing, not who I was, nor where I came from, nor whom I was with. I gave him no clue of any kind, only I said I must see Miss Milicent. He seemed more satisfied when I mentioned her, but he was still disinclined to admit me into the house. ‘Miss Weir,’ he said, ‘was gone out; she had walked somewhere; he thought it must be to Château Gaillard, the castle on the hill. He advised me to go after her;’ and with a tolerably civil bow, he turned away from me. If I had been confidential with him, he might have told me all I wished to know, but I disliked his face. I felt sure he must be one of Mr Weir’s speculating friends, who were leading him again to ruin and dishonour. I would not trust him with the knowledge of what I had heard about Mr Weir and his illness. Whatever there was to learn I would hear from Miss Milicent herself; and knowing that I could find my way to the castle which I had seen on our road from the railway station, I set forth by myself. It was but a little distance, and I soon reached the foot of the hill. The castle looked very different on a near approach—much grander than I had imagined. It stood on a steep promontory; a winding path along the grassy hill led to the summit. I hurried up. If I did not find Miss Milicent there, at least I might discover which road she had taken. The ascent was difficult, and I was out of breath before I stood on the summit of the green hill, with the great keep of the castle immediately before me. But I could not pause to rest. Scrambling over the huge masses of stone, I made my way into the ruin; and, through the broken arch formed by the massive wall, looked down upon a scene so lovely that for the moment it took from me all thought of anything except its beauty. The strong foundations of the castle were partly cut out of the solid rock, partly built up with even masonry. At its base lay the little village of Andely, and beyond flowed the Seine, crossed by a suspension bridge, and winding its way through a bright valley bordered by low hills. The glorious colours of sunset were lighting up the wide expanse of the sky, and steeping the atmosphere in a rich glow which seemed scarcely to belong to

earth. It was a kind of magic picture seen through the framework of the ruined arch. I felt that the castle must have a history belonging to far-off ages, and in comparison of which my petty cares and interests must be worthless even in my own eyes. But I was not caring for myself then, I was thinking of and acting for others; and there is a greatness in that consciousness which renders even the smallest anxieties of moment. Even at Château Gaillard, after the first burst of admiration, I thought only of Mrs Weir and Miss Milicent. I turned from the view, walked round the walls, peeped into caverns which might have been dungeons or stables, and at length, on a point of the hill overlooking the road by which I had ascended, stumbled upon a person dressed in a stuff gown, red handkerchief, and straw bonnet, standing with her hands in the pocket of her cloth jacket;—Miss Milicent,—the same, precisely the same, so it seemed to me, as when we had parted on St Anne's Hill. We recognised each other at the same instant.

I thought she might be startled, but no, she merely tossed up her arms with a momentary surprise, and came up to me, holding out both hands. 'Ursie Grant! where have you dropped from? I am glad to see you. You have come when I was looking for you;' and she shook my hand almost painfully in her heartiness.

'How is Mr Weir?' was my first hurried question.

She did not answer it. 'You are come alone, to be sure,' she said.

'No,' I replied. 'Mrs Weir is at Andely.'

Miss Milicent's countenance expressed great consternation. 'I wrote you word, Ursie Grant, that Andely was not a place for my mother; I said you were to keep her at Rouen. You have done wrong.'

Miss Milicent might have written, but certainly I never received the letter, and we had all trusted to Louise. I again inquired how Mr Weir was.

'As ill as he need be, and better than I expected he would be. I would rather have had the Grand Turk here than my mother.'

'Mrs Weir is very quiet, and very easily managed,' I said; 'she puts up with things in a wonderful way. I don't think, Miss Milicent, you would have kept her away, if you had been with her.'

'I don't know; you are all idiots. But I think,—yes, I

am glad you are come, Ursie. I like women after all;' and Miss Milicent's voice softened, and she put her hand on my shoulder with a movement as nearly caressing as any she ever indulged in.

'You have been very anxious about Mr Weir,' I said. 'Is he out of danger?'

'Yes, so they say; and high time he should be. France isn't a place to be ill in, Ursie. They have no curtains to their beds. I don't care for that, but my father does; and—but where are you going to sleep to-night? There's no room for you where we are.'

I told her we were at Great Andely, and explained our misfortune about the luggage. She scarcely seemed to think of that, but answered, 'Not close, that's a good thing; but you blundered, Ursie, you had no business to come at all. People only put up with things here because they want to see this old castle. I have seen it now till I am tired of it. I had rather look over upon the sea from St Anne's Hill.'

'Then why not come back, Miss Milicent?' I said; 'you know you are wanted.'

'You are a girl of no sense, Ursie Grant; you are always asking, "Why?" Sensible people don't need to ask, "Why;" they know without asking. There are more reasons than I can tell why I can't come home.'

'Mrs Weir's state is very sad,' I said.

'You needn't tell me that, Ursie; you think it isn't upon my conscience, but it is. All I want to know is, which is one's right hand, father or mother, for that is to be the most valued.'

She was bent upon standing on the defensive; I could not argue with her, and only asked some particulars of Mr Weir's state. In her blunt, wandering way, she told me that he was able to sit up, the fever had left him, and he was suffering only from weakness; she hinted at mental worries, but was not open about them. When she last wrote, it seemed, Mr Weir had been anxious about himself, and some feeling for his wife had touched him, and occasioned the message which had been sent. 'But I don't know what he will say now,' added Miss Milicent: 'he is not prepared for her, and he takes things queerly; I can't at all answer for him.'

'He will be in no mood to find fault with Mrs Weir,' I said, 'when he sees her. She is greatly changed.'

I think my tone must have struck Miss Milicent. She answered, 'You didn't make me think that.'

'I tried to do so, Miss Milicent. I have said everything I could think of to make you aware of it; but it appears to me that words have no meaning of their own, but only according to the mind of the person who receives them.'

'You are right there; yes, you are right, certainly. But I wish you hadn't come. My mother's whimsies won't be attended to by French people.'

I answered, 'Mrs Weir has no whimsies, as you call them, left now, Miss Milicent. She has been trained to overcome them. Hers has been a hard life of self-denial of late.'

'Ah! Matilda Temple! It's her doing.'

'Is it?' I said; I could bear her blindness no longer.

She turned round upon me, sharply. 'Have it out, Ursie. What is it you mean!'

'I would rather not tell you, Miss Milicent,' I said; 'I would rather you should come and see Mrs Weir and judge for yourself.'

She shrank back. 'My mother is my mother, Ursie, and I don't forget it: but I can't do for her what you can.'

'Miss Milicent, you might, and you must. Excuse me for saying it. I have brought Mrs Weir here. She is now in your charge.'

She stamped her foot upon the ground. 'Ursie Grant, you forget yourself. It is your own will, your own act and deed.'

'I have followed medical advice,' I said. 'When Mrs Weir is with her husband and her daughter, she ought to want for nothing.'

Miss Milicent was silent for some seconds. She bit her lips and frowned. Then she said, shortly, 'You go back, I suppose, by to-night's train?'

'No,' I said; 'I go back when I feel that I can leave Mrs Weir with safety and comfort. When that will be, Miss Milicent depends upon yourself.'

Without replying, she turned from me, and descended the hill. I followed her. She strode forward for nearly a quarter of a mile. We were drawing near the village when she stopped suddenly. 'Who's doing your work at Sandcombe?' she asked.

'It is done as it can be,' I said; 'I have been obliged to leave it.'

Again there was a pause. I heard the sound of wheels, and

saw the little omnibus coming behind. Miss Milicent looked back also. 'That omnibus goes to the town, Ursie ; I shall go in it !'

'So must I,' I said ; 'I came in it ; and, Miss Milicent, perhaps you would remember that Mrs Weir is without her luggage, and looks to you for help.' She made an impatient movement. 'It's a blunder from beginning to end, Ursie ; my mother ought to have stayed in England ; I don't know what I can do for her.' She stood in great perplexity : then hurried into the house, telling me to make the omnibus wait,—which, as I did not know what to say, was a difficulty ; but the French stranger again came to my assistance. He appeared at the door full of civility : he was glad I had found Miss Weir. He wished he could have accompanied me in the search ; what further help could he give me ?

My short answers could not have been encouraging ; but he would not be thrown back by them. After giving the message to the omnibus-driver, he again began questioning me as to my errand. Miss Milicent returned before I could answer, with a bundle in her hand. She passed the Frenchman as I thought rudely. 'Monsieur Dalange, my father is going to sleep, and does not wish to see any one ; I shall not be back till late.' She peeped into the omnibus, saw it was empty, and motioned me to seat myself beside her. We drove off. Miss Milicent caught hold of my hand. 'Ursie Grant, you are a hard judge, but you have done kindly by me. If I am odd and forgetful, I have troubles you don't know of ; but I will see my mother. May God help her, and me, and all of us ! Now don't talk to me, I must think.'

And she did think, and bitter thoughts they must have been ; for the hard lines of her marked features seem to deepen with some intense inward feeling, whilst she clutched the handle of the carriage door, and leaned her head out of the window, striving, though in vain, to hide the signs of agitation. When we arrived at the inn, she scarcely waited for the omnibus to stop before she was out of it. I said to her that I would go upstairs, and prepare Mrs Weir for seeing her ; but her impatience could with difficulty be controlled. She would not wait in the public room, but followed me into the passage. Louise, who did not seem to think that I had any cause to be annoyed with her, came out of Mrs Weir's room, to tell me that she had been asleep, and was better ; only she had been asking for me.

I forgot my anger, as entirely as Louise did its cause. Motioning to her to go into her own room, I went softly up to Mrs Weir, who was lying on the bed, and was just beginning to tell her that I had been successful,—when a long arm was stretched across me, and Miss Milicent pushed me aside, and said, ‘ You have had Ursie Grant long enough with you, mother, I am come to know myself how you are going on ; and I have brought you a bundle of clothes ;’ and she tossed the parcel on the bed, and stooped down and kissed her mother, roughly indeed, but heartily. I dare say it was the best thing that could have been done. It was not arranged as I wished, but no doubt preparation would only have made Mrs Weir more nervous. As it was, she was startled, and looked at her daughter, as though not quite recognising her ; and the strange gaze had such an effect on Miss Milicent, that she turned aside and burst into tears.

‘ What does she cry for, Ursula ?’ said Mrs Weir, recovering herself. ‘ It is very kind of her to come, and it does me good ; and now I will go to my husband.’ She sat up on the bed, and put out her hand for Miss Milicent to draw near.

‘ Mrs Weir didn’t know you, Miss Milicent,’ I said ; speaking as naturally and brightly as I could. ‘ You were taken quite by surprise, ma’am, weren’t you ?’ I added, addressing Mrs Weir. ‘ I found Miss Milicent wandering over the ruins of an old castle ; she had gone out to take a walk ; afterwards we met the omnibus returning from the railway, and so she said she would come back with me, and see you now ; and to-morrow, or next day, you will no doubt be able to see Mr Weir, for he is much better, and able to sit up.’

I think it must have been the mention of the omnibus which brought us all back to a natural state. Miss Milicent brushed away her tears, came up to the bed-side, and sat down ; and Mrs Weir leaned back again on her pillow. ‘ If you would be good enough to tell Mrs Weir what you have been doing lately, Miss Milicent,’ I said, ‘ I am sure she will be glad to hear ; and I will go and order tea, and perhaps, if you are not in a hurry, you will just be so kind as to put the table out, and have some with her ; I will bring up another candle and make the room look comfortable.’ I said it all as if we had been at Dene, and there was nothing easier than to make things comfortable, but I had great misgivings as to how it was to be managed. One point, however, was gained. Miss Milicent and her mother were together, and I was sure that one interview, if only of five

minutes, would do more to touch Miss Milicent's heart than any description that could be given.

She came out to me, as I was standing at my bedroom door, having just given directions for tea.

'I can't stay with her, Ursie, she doesn't understand, and she's quite changed.' Miss Milicent's face looked haggard.

'Mrs Weir will be better,' I said, 'to-morrow. Everything that is new unsettles her.'

'But you shouldn't have come; what shall we do here? How will she bear it? Ursie, you have much to answer for.'

'Not so much as if we had remained behind, and waited for the end, which must in all probability have come,' I said.

'End!—what end?—what do you mean?'

'A lunatic asylum.'

Miss Milicent covered her face with her hands, and groaned.

I did not want to distress her more than was needful. She had taken an exaggerated view of the present evil, and no wonder. Mrs Weir, when startled, took a long time to recover herself. She was not by any means, as far from rational as her daughter thought; but, impetuous and ungoverned in all her feelings, Miss Milicent would not listen to me, or believe me. Yet she could not bring herself to look at the case boldly. Availing herself of the claim which, no doubt, Mr Weir had upon her, she made it an excuse to hurry away. She would return, she said, to-morrow. She would see her mother again; she would arrange the meeting; she would do anything, everything I wished. But she could not bear the pain; she shrank from the responsibility. Even yet Miss Milicent had much to learn.

CHAPTER LXVI.

MRS WEIR took it much to heart that her daughter had left her so soon, and I rather troubled myself as to how Miss Milicent would get back to Little Andely, but she knew the ways of the people, and it was a quiet part of the country; so I hoped she would not mind walking alone. But I was obliged to leave her to herself, and attend to Mrs Weir, whose mind, I was sure, was in much perplexity. Happily, after a little quiet explanation, I was able to make her see how things stood. I told

her plainly that Mr Weir was at a neighbouring village, and that she might go to him the next day if she wished it ; but I endeavoured to convince her that, as he was better, there was no hurry, and she need only remain quiet, and rest after her journey. She acquiesced for the time, but I could not say how long the mood would last. Mrs Weir ate more for her tea than I expected, which was very satisfactory. Louise and I had a kind of supper in the public room down-stairs, and were waited upon by the pleasant-looking Normandy peasant girl, who was overwhelmed with delight when she found that madame liked the roast fowl which I took up to her, and was persuaded to taste the wood strawberries. We might, certainly, have been in much worse quarters, for the people were extremely civil. About half-past nine I made Mrs Weir comfortable for the night, and left her with the door between her room and mine open, and a little bell by her side, that she might call me if she wanted anything, and then I thought of rest for myself. But my troubles were not over, I had scarcely gone to my room when I heard sounds of merriment below, fortunately away from the side of the house adjoining Mrs Weir's room, but very near to mine. I supposed there might be some late guests in the house, but when I lay down in bed the sound of a flageolet was added, and the people, whoever they were, began to dance. And such a noise as they made !—stamping, shouting, laughing, singing, clapping of hands—sleep was impossible. I lay awake, studying a book of French conversation, by the light of a tallow candle, till nearly two o'clock in the morning ; then there came the roll of some vehicle to the door, and the dancers began to disperse, and I fell asleep. It must have been eight o'clock, and the sun was shining full into my window, when I was awakened by the touch of no very gentle hand.

‘ Ursie Grant, what makes you so lazy ? I want to talk to you.’ I fancied myself at the Heath ; and, as I rubbed my eyes, almost believed I should look out upon the cliffs and the sea. Miss Milicent quickly brought me back to reality. ‘ I went off in a hurry last night, Ursie ; I am come back to do better to-day, but my mother mustn't come to us. My father isn't in a state to bear it.’

I could have wished that Miss Milicent had left me time to dress and prepare myself a little for the day's business, instead of thus thrusting it upon me, but perhaps that was more than I had a right to expect.

‘I am afraid Mr Weir is not so well,’ I said.

‘I can’t say ; the long and the short of the matter is, Ursie, that I must talk to you.’

She sat down, leaned her two elbows upon the bed, and disregarding every thought of convenience or comfort for me, prepared herself to begin a long story. Louise was with Mrs Weir, that was my only consolation, and I collected my largest stock of patience.

‘You know, Ursie, matters are bad with us, and have been so for a long time. My father spent money faster than he got it. My mother had more whimsies than there were minutes in the year. I dare say I was not better myself. But people must live ; my father must live. When he came abroad he took some money with him ; they said he ought not to have done it, but he says he must have starved without it. Then he made friends,—whether they are friends or not, I can’t say, he calls them so ; that M. Dalange is one. He engaged with them in a kind of wine business ; I suppose it is speculation, but it seems all right enough to me. Mr Macdonald and Captain Price have money in the same business, and they are growing rich. You see, Ursie, I couldn’t come home, because my father’s money was all gone in this business, and my money, which was sent to me, was all he had to live upon. That is how the case stood. I believe it would all have gone right except for Monsieur Dalange. I haven’t any faith in him. I believe he is a rogue. But we aren’t rich, though we thought we should be, and now all will go to the ground unless there is some help ; and there is no one to help but me and my mother ; and I think, Ursie Grant, it is a good thing you are come, after all, though I didn’t think so last night, for now you can persuade my mother to do what she should do, and give her assistance to get us all straight again. You see, when she has done this, things will go on well, and we can go and live where we choose. I think, perhaps, if we went to the Pyrenees it would do, for my father likes mountain air, and so do I, and my mother will be freshened by it.’

If a gulf had opened beneath my feet, I could scarcely have been more alarmed than I was at the maze of wilfulness, folly, selfishness,—and I had great reason to fear, roguery, which this speech revealed to me. Miss Milicent fixed her eyes upon me, and when I did not answer, touched my arm : ‘You understand now, Ursie, don’t you ? It is all clear.’

‘No, Miss Milicent,’ I said. ‘I don’t understand ; or at

least I hope I don't. Mrs Weir has only just sufficient to keep her in comfort, and I believe you have not more. You don't mean to say that you would persuade her, or allow yourself, to risk money in schemes of which you know nothing, and conducted by such people as Mr Macdonald, Captain Price, and this Frenchman, whom you own yourself you believe to be a rogue.'

'But I do know about the scheme, Ursie. I have had the whole thing explained to me, and there will be profit for us in it, there must be by and by. Only just now help is wanted. You don't think me a fool, do you?'

I kept my thoughts to myself. 'Miss Milicent,' I said, 'these are matters in which I can have no voice or judgment. As far as I am concerned, I can only say that to trouble Mrs Weir with them might have most fatal effects. She ought at least to have time given her to recover herself, after the anxiety she has had; and then the whole thing ought to be a matter of consultation with her friends and the lawyers. It is not for a person like me to interfere at all about it.'

'But I hate lawyers,' she exclaimed. 'I have made a vow never to have anything to do with them. They are a greedy, grasping race, and I choose to settle my own affairs without them.'

'Of course,' I said, 'no one can interfere with your own affairs, Miss Milicent, but Mrs Weir's are different; and it seems to me, if you will allow me to say it, that we women sometimes make mistakes when we think we can engage in business which properly belongs to men.'

'I don't know anything about "properly belongs," I know what I have done and will do. Ever since I was twenty-one I took my own course, and I am not going to be fettered now.'

'And do you have no advice?' I said.

'Yes, people who understand much better than lawyers would,' she replied. 'But we won't talk about it, Ursie Grant; I see you put your face against it.'

'Against mentioning the subject to Mrs Weir,' I said; 'and indeed, Miss Milicent, you may think me taking too much upon myself, but if it came to the point, I would, upon my own responsibility, carry Mrs Weir back to England this very day, rather than she should run the risk of having it named to her.'

I was bold—almost to the point of impertinence, yet I knew well the person with whom I had to deal;—the will which could

only be governed by an assertion of power beyond its own, but which was taken by surprise when that assertion was made, and sank beneath it almost without a struggle.

Miss Milicent was quite silent for some seconds ; then looking up at me fiercely, she said, 'It's a mess.'

'Yes,' I said, 'a great mess, and, Miss Milicent, if you trust to yourself to get out of it, you will only sink the deeper.'

'And who is to help me out, Ursie? Not you—you wouldn't stretch out your hand to help a dog.'

'It is a man's business, Miss Milicent,' was my reply, 'a man who has a head for figures, and could advise Mr Weir and you, and be up to the arts of these people whom you suspect. A man it ought to have been from the first,' I could not help adding.

She caught me up there. 'I know what you mean—I know what you are always cutting at, but I don't give in. My father liked to have me, and we have had a good, pleasant time, and shall come all right by and—only'—— a look of extreme perplexity came over her.

'I am afraid things are awkward now,' I said, venturing to complete her sentence.

'Yes, that's the whole of it, and if you can let me have five pounds, it can be settled between my mother's accounts and mine.'

Poor thing ! I felt for her deeply, for it was a great struggle, —she had such a proud spirit ! and it was hard to be obliged to make the request to me.

But it was still harder to me to reply. 'I am afraid, Miss Milicent, I have no money to give. I have only what may be wanted for Mrs Weir's own expenses, and for that I am answerable to Mrs Temple.'

'Matilda Temple ! control my mother's money—and mine ! For it is mine, too ! Ursie Grant, you don't know what you are saying.'

'You left Mrs Weir's affairs in Mrs Temple's hands, Miss Milicent,' I said.

She was stung to the quick. 'And I was an idiot for doing so,' she exclaimed. 'But I trusted to you,' she added, looking reproachfully at me.

'Indeed, then,' I said, 'you trusted to a person who had no power, and could have none. But, Miss Milicent, it is not for me to show you where you may have been wrong ; only, just at

present, you will see yourself that my hands are tied, and if I wished it ever so much, I could do nothing for you.'

'You don't wish it,' I heard her mutter to herself, and I took up the words and said—

'You are right; I don't wish it.'

She leaned her forehead upon her hands. I went on:—'If I could help you, as you ask me, it would only be help for the moment; and if you embark more money in these speculations, you will only, so it appears to me, run the risk of losing it. Indeed, Miss Milicent, I cannot but feel there is only one course for you, and I should think it would be the best for Mr Weir; at once to send for some persons whom you can trust, put everything into his hands, and be guided by his advice.'

She looked up scornfully.

'And where am I to send? To the moon? Are wise counsellors to be had for the asking?'

'They won't be had without the asking,' I replied; 'and I suppose it needn't be a lawyer.'

'It won't be,' she said, nodding her head at me, with a kind of angry smile.

'Then it must be some one else,' I said.

'And who?' She put the question triumphantly.

'John Hervey,' I replied. I spoke on the impulse of the moment,—chiefly, I believe, because I had once before named him to Miss Milicent, and that he was always associated in my mind with the thought of Mr Weir. I had no sooner mentioned him, than innumerable objections suggested themselves to me.

Miss Milicent was too angry to argue. 'Pshaw!' she exclaimed. 'John Hervey is your idol. Do you think my father would talk to him?'

I felt piqued. 'John Hervey is an honest man,' I said, 'and has a good, clear head for accounts; and he is one, also, who has been always accustomed to business, and has had a good deal of his own to manage, especially of late. I should think, Miss Milicent, you might go farther and fare worse. At any rate, he is a friend, and a true one.'

I touched her there. She gazed at me with moistened eyes, and said, 'Ursie, if I believed that, I should be thankful.'

'He is one, most truly,' I repeated. 'He has been at the bottom of most of the thoughtful things which have been done for you and Mrs Weir of late, Miss Milicent. If you could

bring yourself to confide in him, you might bless the day on which we have had this conversation.'

She stood up suddenly. 'You have pens and ink, Ursie; where are they?'

'There is no hurry,' I said; 'surely you will go back and consult Mr Weir.'

'I will consult no one; I have had too much of consultation already. And that French rogue in the house, too, expecting to be told everything! John Hervey would be murdered before he got here, if it was thought he was coming.'

I did not dread quite such tragic consequences; but I did see that it might be better not to put either Mr Weir or his friend on their guard by letting the idea be known. Miss Milicent scrawled a few lines, and put the paper into my hands, telling me that I was to write, and explain more fully. She had only said she wanted to see him.

'And where is he to come?' I inquired. 'Here?'

'Here? No. Why should we stay here? When my father can move, we shall go back to Paris,—if we don't go to Brittany.'

So wild and vague she was still, and there were so many questions to be settled! I made another effort after something definite.

'Mrs Weir must see Mr Weir to-day,' I said.

'Well! Yes, I suppose so.' But Miss Milicent said it unwillingly.

'But he must not mention money to her.'

'I can't say. People are waiting to hear what we determine.'

'If he does,' I replied, 'he will bring on an attack of nervous excitement, which may end no one knows how.'

'I can't answer for him,' was Miss Milicent's rather sullen answer.

'But you really must answer for him, Miss Milicent,' I said. 'What is the use of sending for John Hervey if you are to determine what shall be done before he comes? As for Mrs Weir, she is not now in a state to form a correct judgment about her own affairs; and if anything is forced upon her now, I will be the person to come forward and say it is illegal.'

Whether I had a right to threaten in this way I had not the least idea, but I was driven to it, and Miss Milicent, who was as ignorant as myself about all law matters, was frightened by it.

'We have no money for the present time, unless something is

done,' she muttered in an undertone. 'M. Dalange will advance some when we have signed the agreement.'

Her inconsistency exasperated and alarmed me; I said, 'Miss Milicent, upon one condition, I can help you, at least for the present. Let Mr Weir engage that nothing shall be said to Mrs Weir about money for the next three weeks, until, that is, she has recovered from her journey, and do you promise yourself that you will enter into no engagement with these speculating men till you have seen John Hervey. Mr Weir and yourself can in that case join Mrs Weir, and your expenses will be paid by me, acting for Mrs Weir, for the present, and can be repaid when your affairs are more settled. I think,' I said, 'I am not going beyond my limits by offering this.'

A door of relief seemed opened, but it was to Miss Milicent rather than to me. At the moment, it seemed to me, that if I had had an idea of this troubled sea into which I was to be thrown, I never should have ventured to bring Mrs Weir away from England.

Miss Milicent, however, saw everything by the light of her own eyes. She had come to me evidently in such perplexity, that the very thought of escape seemed the escape itself.

'If they could have present help, her father,' she said, 'would promise,—yes, she could make him promise, she was sure; he was in such a fret, he did not know how to get on from day to day, and he had been so ill, and was longing so to go back to Paris. Now we should all go there directly. And M. Dalange,—she did not know what could be done about him, but he must wait; she thought she could put him off, and when John Hervey came he would see things clearly, he would not be like me, afraid to risk a penny; and then the money which was wanted would be advanced to M. Dalange, and the business would go on well, and they should all grow rich together.'

I did not contradict her; I only tried to impress upon her more strongly, that nothing was to be said to Mrs Weir, and afterwards I suggested as civilly as I could that she should leave me to dress. She went down-stairs into the public room, for Mrs Weir was not ready for her, and I dressed as quickly as possible, feeling half asleep, and extremely tired, but seeing a great deal of work before me.

CHAPTER LXVII.

I COULD never be said to have known Mr Weir. When he was at Dene, I seldom even saw him latterly ; when I did, it was rarely that he spoke to me. I had a strong prejudice against him, partly arising from his unpleasant manner, but more from all that I had heard of him ; and when there is this kind of natural aversion, it is almost sure to be perceived and returned. And Mrs Weir's arrival was the last thing which her husband was likely to desire. It would interfere with his plans, and trouble his daily comfort ; and he knew enough of my connection with his family to be aware that I had been instrumental in bringing about the meeting. It was not likely, therefore, that anything that I could do would find favour in his eyes. Most especially he was likely to resent the idea of my imposing conditions upon him. I felt my position to be extremely awkward, and with a feeling of nervous dread, such as I had rarely experienced, I found myself in the afternoon in a little shaky carriage, the only one which could be met with in the place, accompanying Mrs Weir to pay the long anticipated visit to her husband. Miss Milicent, after seeing her mother for a few minutes in the morning, had gone back to prepare Mr Weir for what was to come, and I would willingly have persuaded Mrs Weir to wait till another day, but now that she was a little rested, her earnestness upon the subject was returning, and I dared not delay ; especially as I had received a few lines from Miss Milicent, since our interview, telling me that her father had consented to the meeting, and gave his promise as I desired. Money must indeed have been much needed at the moment, or Mr Weir would never have bound himself so readily to an agreement which stood in the way of his schemes, but having been given, I had no right to doubt that it would be kept.

Mrs Weir herself was the greatest lesson I could have had upon the duty of simple faith, in times of difficulty. When I told her that the carriage was at the door, and that she was going, I prepared myself to see her excited and agitated. But it was not so. She merely said, ' I am ready, Ursula ; God will help me ; ' and that was the first expression which gave me the idea of the fear which I am sure was at the bottom of her heart, even when she was most pleadingly bent upon joining her husband. She did not speak nor look about her as we drove along, but kept

her hand in mine, and I felt it tremble very much. At last, just as we reached the village, she said, 'He will not be angry, Ursula; do you think so?' and when I answered lightly, 'Oh no! ma'am, what could he be angry about?' she received my assurance with childlike submission, and never repeated the question.

Miss Milicent was waiting at the door to receive us. I had never seen her look so subdued, and I thought she had had a stormy morning. The inn was by no means so good as ours. It grieved me that Mrs Weir should have to mount the narrow staircase, and I thought the stifling air would affect her breathing; but with my help she went up firmly, though slowly, only once or twice stopping and glancing round with rather a wandering, unsettled gaze, which I did not thoroughly like.

'Here's my mother come, father,' said Miss Milicent, throwing open the door of Mr Weir's room. I was drawing back, but Mrs Weir grasped my arm, and I led her into the room. It was tolerably large, but very scantily furnished. Mr Weir was sitting by a stove, with an uncovered deal table at his right hand; his bed was in one corner in a recess. The cold, poverty-stricken air of the apartment was perhaps the more remarkable to my eye, because I was not accustomed to the French fashion of living without curtains and carpets; but it was not the room which fixed my attention, it was Mr Weir himself. He was thin, and his face showed that he had been very ill. He wore a loose dressing-gown and slippers. His hair was long, and his beard had been suffered to grow; all these things make a great change in a man; but no such external differences could have given me the impression which I gained from his face. It was sunk, lowered. As Mrs Weir, in her most childish incoherent movements, bore the tokens of a nature which must at last rise above human infirmity; so did this cold, selfish man of the world carry about with him the signs of one which must, except through some miracle of mercy, eventually fall below it. It was the first thing which struck me; yet he was a gentleman still. He rose when we entered, came forward, and kissed his wife, saying, 'Welcome, my dear,' and placed her in a chair by his side, making a distant bow to me.

There was a pause. Mrs Weir looked at him steadily for a few seconds; then, turning round to me, asked, 'Who is it?'

I could not answer.

'He is glad to see you, mother,' said Miss Milicent, coming up to her.

‘Very glad, my dear,’ said Mr Weir. ‘Young woman,’ he addressed himself to me, ‘I forget your name, perhaps you will have the goodness to go down-stairs, and ask for a bottle of lemonade ; it will refresh Mrs Weir.’

It was an excuse to send me away, and I was going, but I could not free myself from Mrs Weir. ‘Is it he, Ursula?’ she said in a low voice ; ‘it seems so long, I think I have forgotten ; but he speaks kindly.’

‘Mr Weir is very glad to see you, dear ma’am,’ I said ; ‘you know he has been very ill, so of course he doesn’t look as you remember him.’

‘No, Ursula ; but he may be angry with me. Perhaps now he would wish me to go back again, and I would do it. What God wills I would do. Just tell me, Ursula, tell me.’

I looked appealingly to Miss Milicent, but she was greatly distressed ; I saw it by the way in which she bit her lip ; she would not trust herself to speak.

Mr Weir came to my relief with the cold polish of manner which I now so well recollected. ‘I can only be flattered by your having come so far to see me, my dear,’ he said. ‘It would be uncourteous to wish you to return. All I can regret is that I have not better accommodation to offer you ; but perhaps,’ he added, and he turned to me with a tone of proud indifference, ‘perhaps, if Mrs Weir were able to remove to Paris in a few days, you might be able to find some more comfortable lodging for her. I suppose she is equal to the journey.’

‘Mrs Weir will be ready to go wherever you go, sir,’ was my reply. ‘It was her object in coming abroad.’

‘Certainly, certainly. I am not strong yet, but I think—Milicent, my dear, I leave you and this young woman to arrange your plans. When they are settled, I can fall into them.’

‘You will like to go to Paris, mother?’ said Miss Milicent.

Mrs Weir did not directly answer, so the question was impatiently repeated.

‘Paris is not like this place, Ursula, is it?’ said Mrs Weir, giving her answer to me. ‘My husband has been ill. I ought to see that he is comfortable in France, but I do not know how. Will he’—— her voice trembled, and for the first time she addressed her husband directly : ‘George, will you come back to England?’

There must have been something in that familiar name, which touched with warmth even Mr Weir’s heartlessness. It might

have been an association of bygone years, of the days when his wife in her simplicity and childish awe, first ventured to address him by it ; it might have contrasted with the hopes he had then given her, and the wreck of health and happiness of which he too well knew himself to be the cause. Be that as it may, he rose from his seat, drew near her, and taking her hand, said, 'England cannot be my home, my dear, but you must come and see me in France,' immediately afterwards, as though ashamed of having given way to that slight expression of feeling before me, he added in a light tone : 'We have forgotten the lemonade. You must have some to drink to my better health ; they have no wines fit for such a purpose here.'

I was afraid to leave him, for I feared the subject he might introduce ; but I did him injustice. His word was given, and he would not have dared to break it. Yet, no doubt, for other causes he disliked seeing me in the room. I must have seemed to him a spy and an intruder. I disengaged myself from Mrs Weir and went down-stairs. M. Dalange was in the salon. The look with which he greeted me showed me at one glance that we were enemies. I curtsied to him, and having given the order for the lemonade, sat down. He drew near and addressed me in his broken English. He hoped I was well, not the worse for my late walk ; he seemed as before determined to make acquaintance, but my answers were short. He was not, however, to be repulsed ; after an observation to which I made no reply, he said abruptly,—'We have a friend, known to us both, I think,—a Mrs Price.'

I replied that I knew Mrs Price to speak to her,—I could not call her a friend.

'Ah ! yes, I thought so.' He did not appear to comprehend my denial of friendship. 'Have you seen Mrs Price lately?'

'I know nothing of her or her concerns,' was the answer I longed to make, but an uneasiness I could not conquer led me to pursue the subject. 'Not very lately,' I said. 'I have not been at my home for some weeks.'

'Indeed ! yet she interests herself much about you.'

This really was too intolerable. Mrs Price interest herself about me, and write or talk of me to this French stranger ! It was an impertinence not to be imagined. I hope I did not quite show all I felt, and I know I tried to answer quietly, 'I think, sir, you are mistaken. Mrs Price is a very distant acquaintance,

and has no interest in me, and no concern in any of my affairs. There must be some mistake.'

M. Dalange smiled sarcastically, 'Oh dear, no; not at all. There can be no mistake. Surely you are friends. I think a sister of yours must have been staying in the house of Mrs Price. Could it not be so?'

'I really don't know, sir,' was my reply, and I instantly rose and left the room. I walked out into the road—there was no other place I could go to—in a storm of irritated feeling. Whatever Mrs Price had said about me must have been in reference to the speculations and Mr Weir's affairs. She had no doubt a right to say anything she chose, but the mere fact of being talked of, or written about, by those one dislikes always, I think, seems an impertinence; and the manner adopted by M. Dalange increased my annoyance. A few moments' reflection convinced me that it would be foolish to allow myself to take offence, especially at a foreigner—a man whom I might never see again; but one fact remained, which reflection only rendered more anxious—communications were passing between Mrs Price and Jessie. There was no end to the intimacy. Stay at Denc she could not, I was sure Roger would never allow it. But some intercourse there must be, and that of a kind which betokened more than ordinary friendliness; and yet no one mentioned it; no one wrote to me. Mrs Kemp, I knew, would be on the watch, after receiving my letter, and she would surely have written to me if she had seen or heard anything she disapproved. Could Jessie's acquaintance be carried on secretly?—and if so, what could be the motive?

As I thought, I almost made up my mind at once to write out all my fears and suspicions to Roger. I hoped he would understand, and trusted he would be merciful. But again I hesitated. The ground upon which a husband and wife stand, is known only to themselves. All other persons are placed in certain relations to each other, which may be calculated according to some general principles of human nature; but marriage forms, as it were, a new combination, which no one but the individuals themselves can be acquainted with. The fact of the tie being one of choice, like that of friendship, and yet indissoluble, like that of birth, puts it beyond the reach of ordinary laws. Each case must be dealt with separately; and what chord in Roger's breast I might touch by insinuating the slightest doubt of his wife's perfect openness in all her dealings with him, I could not

venture to predict. Generous, loving, and forgiving, as he would be to me his sister, there might be a depth of wounded feeling with regard to his wife, which might even render him unjust. No, Jessie herself, could be the only person safely to suggest Jessie's faults.

It must be left for the present, for a few weeks,—it could not, should not be more. Once in Paris, with John Hervey to support me, Miss Milicent must be forced to open her eyes to the wrong course she was pursuing. She must be compelled to return to England with Mrs Weir ; whose morbid mind would, I hoped, be satisfied, at least for a while, now that she had once seen her husband, and proved to him her willingness to join him. What was to come after that, I could not at present think. Perhaps some plan might be arranged for a meeting at certain times,—once a year, or not so often,—anything that would satisfy Mrs Weir ; and yet enable her friends to watch over her, so that she and Miss Milicent might not be ruined by their own weakness, and Mr Weir's wild and selfish speculations. I need not trouble myself with thinking of all that distant future,—only, go home I must, the very first moment I could be spared. Till then,—prayer and faith. What would the world be without them ? I turned back to the inn, and went up-stairs, inquired if Mrs Weir was ready to return, and found Mr Weir engaged in giving her an account of his illness, and Miss Milicent placing cushions at the back of her chair. She looked placid, but very weary ; yet I was satisfied. When I remembered her condition in that dark bedroom in London, I felt we had done wisely.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

TIME moves slowly when one is describing ; but not so slowly as when one is waiting and expecting. We were detained at Andely more than a week. Our luggage was returned to us the day after we lost it, and we then regularly established ourselves at the inn. Mr Weir regained his strength with tolerable rapidity ; but his illness had been severe. Every day Mrs Weir drove over to see him, sat with him for about a quarter of an hour, asked the same questions, and heard the same

answers, and returned to lie down on her bed, and be nursed for the remainder of the day.

With the discomforts of the little inn, the smallness of the rooms, the increasing cold of the weather, and the absence of the niceties to which Mrs Weir had been accustomed, it would have been very hard to bear but for the prospect of removal. In Paris, Miss Milicent assured her mother they should be quite comfortable. She evidently believed that Mrs Weir was going to stay there for a permanence, and that I intended to remain and take care of her. I did not endeavour to undeceive her. I lived in the hope that all would be made easy by the arrival of John Hervey.

M. Dalange went the day after my conversation with him—that was no slight relief to me—but Miss Milicent informed me that we should probably meet him again at Paris, and that perhaps Mr Macdonald would join us. A pleasant prospect! But they could scarcely be more disagreeable to me than Mr Weir, whose satirical politeness made me feel every day more and more how entirely I had made him my enemy. But I cared for none of them. I did not think of any of them. My one object and interest was Mrs Weir; and the attentions which she claimed were very engrossing. I was by no means satisfied about her. Not that I regretted for a moment having brought her abroad; it was the one hope which remained; it had been tried under medical sanction, and, no doubt, to a certain extent it had succeeded. Mrs Weir's mind could scarcely be said to have been strengthened, but at least it was calm. There was nothing, however, which indicated any permanent return to the state in which she had been even a year ago. We could not induce her to work, or occupy herself in any way; and she would listen to no reading except the Bible. It was beautiful, though in some respects mournful, to see how this one pillar of strength supported her weakened intellect. The contrast was so great. The very clearness of her faith, the fulness of her comprehension on the one subject of religion, made the shattered condition of her mind upon all worldly matters only the more painful. It was like that rare gift of simple belief which we sometimes are permitted to see developing itself in a little child, shut out by illness from all instruction, or even from communication with the world about it, and so living, by the grace of God's Spirit working on the vividness of its infant imagination, in the realities of the world unseen. They who have never watched such a

phenomenon are not likely to believe in its existence. They who have, treasure it silently in their hearts as a token sent from the 'better land,' not to be exhibited, but to be kept in store against the hour of temptation. Even now, in these weary days of delay, deprived of her usual comforts, with perpetual little annoyances as regarded food, and warmth, and careful attendance, there was one sentence always ready from Mrs Weir's lips, 'God sends it, Ursula;' and when she had said this, there was no more thought of complaint. She would lie on her bed waiting, till my patience was quite exhausted, whilst something was being prepared for her which had been ordered, and misunderstood, or forgotten. Several times I wished her to let me try my own English cookery, but the habit of submission and endurance which she had learned during her hard discipline under Mrs Temple was now so fixed, that I could not persuade her to allow it. 'What was sent,' she said, 'that she would take;' and once or twice, when unknown to herself I had contrived some little delicacy which I thought she would fancy, she discovered it with singular quickness, and observed, gently, but reproachfully, 'Ah! Ursula, you would make me troublesome as I used to be; that is not right;' and I could scarcely persuade her to touch it, except by looking vexed and disappointed. The feeling was not reasonable, not like common sense, yet it seemed to me to belong to some sense which was higher and better—only, perhaps, it required to be transplanted to another world.

I had no news from home except a few lines from Roger, who was never in the habit of writing long letters. He told me everything was going on well, and that Jessie had been into Hove, but nothing else except about household and farming concerns. From John Hervey I had a short note, saying that he hoped to be in Paris in the course of the next week or ten days, but that he could not fix the exact time.

When Miss Milicent found that he had really agreed to her proposal, I think she became a little frightened as to the step she had taken, but I did my best to reassure her, for every day made me see more and more that if she was allowed to follow her own guidance, or place herself in Mr Weir's hands, great mischief would follow. After receiving John's letter, I urged our departure for Paris as soon as possible. The change I hoped might be serviceable to Mrs Weir, and it was a very dreary, uncomfortable life we were living at the little inn.

Movement was delightful to Miss Milicent. She was in high

spirits on the morning we were to leave Andely, and took all the arrangements of the journey on herself. We went back to Gaillon in the shaky carriage which had lately been hired for Mrs Weir, and sent Louise with the luggage by the little omnibus; and very different the road seemed to me, when viewed by the light of a bright sun, from what it was on the evening of the dreary journey which brought us to Andely. I felt exceedingly thankful, that so far my plans might be said to have prospered, for whatever might be the event as regarded the object for which I had left England, at least I hoped to be instrumental in saving Miss Milicent from further folly.

We were to take possession of the same rooms at Paris, which Mr Weir and Miss Milicent had before occupied. Miss Milicent assured me they would be very comfortable for her mother, and I was obliged to trust to her. I believe the woman of the house promised as many bedrooms as could be wanted; but, not understanding French, I could only leave these things to others, and content myself with paying—and very fast the money went. When I was told that a French franc, so like our English shilling, was tenpence, I fancied everything in France must be cheap, and certainly they made us pay wonderfully little at Andely; but I soon changed my mind when we arrived at Paris.

The journey was short and easy, and Mrs Weir bore it very well; and though she did not take much notice of anything herself, she sat quiet and allowed me to look about as I wished. I was in the first-class carriage with her, for Miss Milicent would not undertake the charge of her father and mother both, and, indeed, I think it would have been more than she could manage, though it troubled me a little to find how Mrs Weir depended upon me, and I thought how I should ever manage to leave her.

We entered Paris about half-past two, or nearly three o'clock. Miss Milicent was highly excited. 'Now, Ursie, look—do you see? here is the station. We shall stop directly. You keep with my mother. Father, don't you trouble yourself, I will see to the luggage, and will come after you with it.' And the moment the train stopped, Miss Milicent jumped out, called a cab, or what in London we should say was a cab, made her father and mother, Louise and myself, get into it, gave the direction to the driver, and sent us off. What we were to do without her I could not tell; but she would not hear my expostulation, and away we drove through the streets of tall houses, gay with shops, and crowded with people—and my head was distracted with

the noise, and my thoughts reverted uncomfortably to the luggage, left in the charge of Miss Milicent. I don't think I half enjoyed that first sight of Paris, except in recollection. We stopped in rather a narrow street, and entered a court-yard. A woman appeared from a little room like the bar-room at an hotel, which opened into it, and there was some talk with Louise, and on we went into an inner court, in which one or two people were standing, idling about. Louise knocked at a green door, and made some more inquiries; but Mr Weir, seeming quite at home, entered, telling us to follow. Such a dirty, uncarpeted, winding staircase as we had to mount! It was as though all the little boys in Paris had been amusing themselves that morning, by running up and down with muddy shoes on. I hope Mrs Weir did not notice it, but the way in which she put her foot upon the first step made me fear she did. At the top, however, it was better, the lobby was wide, and when we opened another door we were in a dark but clean passage.

'This will be your room, my dear,' said Mr Weir, as he threw open the door of a little sitting-room with rather a grand air. I had expected something very pretty; but my dismay was great when I saw a cheerless-looking apartment, with a polished floor, a small table in one corner, looking as though it had come there by accident, a chiffonnier, a few chairs, and a window looking out upon the leads of the neighbouring house. 'And this will be your bedroom,' continued Mr Weir, with the same grand air which reminded me of the time when he had been accustomed to show off the beauties of Dene. There was more hope in the bedroom; a French bed always looks comfortable; and there were besides one or two ornamental vases, and a little clock, and some artificial flowers, and a sofa; and the window fronted the court-yard, in which were a few plants. Mrs Weir might make herself at home there. But that dreary salon! It quite weighed upon my mind. It need not have done so, however; I don't think Mrs Weir was able then to remark anything, she was too tired, and I only had to put her upon the sofa, and make her rest herself, till the luggage came. Mr Weir soon left her, which was a blessing; his presence always oppressed her. I hoped she would fall asleep, but she was restless, and I was a little afraid she might be feverish. At last, however, she did close her eyes, and I was just thinking how glad I was, when a great noise was heard outside the room, the door was burst open, and in came two men with boxes, followed by Miss Milicent. 'There, Ursie;

now haven't I managed well? Mother, how are you? Louise, where is Louise?' and away hurried Miss Milicent, leaving the two Frenchmen behind her. They stayed, evidently not for a moment thinking they were in the way, talking and moving the boxes about, and going out into the passage and bringing in more packages, till Miss Milicent and Louise returned, and increased chattering went on, and another man, I believe the master of the house, was called up to settle some question about payment. It nearly drove me frantic, till I heard Mrs Weir's gentle voice say,—'Ursula, if they would be kind enough not to speak quite so loudly I should be glad. My head is aching.' I could not be frantic then, even for her.

CHAPTER LXIX.

BEFORE I had been many days in Paris I was inexpressibly thankful for the back rooms and the court-yard. The noise in the streets was distracting; a loud clatter, far worse than the continual rumble in London. If I had been alone, and wishing only to amuse myself, of course it would have been different. I should have willingly borne the noise for the sake of seeing everything; but amusement was by no means in my thoughts. I went out once or twice with Miss Milicent at her mother's request; but I could less and less bear to leave Mrs Weir. She was becoming very weak. The weight which had oppressed her mind seemed now to be doing its work upon her body. In London I should have said that she might have lived for years,—a saddened, dreary life. In Paris, as I watched her day by day, it seemed as though the breath of her existence was but the flickering of a light flame, soon about to be extinguished for ever. I doubt if any one saw it but myself. Mr Weir, in his extreme selfishness, no sooner found himself settled in tolerable comfort, and living at the expense of another, than he seemed to set aside anything like care or thought, and to turn his attention only to the easiest means of whiling away the time which hung heavy upon his hands. He was expecting M. Dalange, and, as I soon understood, Mr Macdonald. When they arrived, no doubt he fully anticipated gaining his point with his wife, and plunging again into speculations. In the meantime, he rose very

late, and went out as much as he could, taking Miss Milicent with him ; she herself, as I perceived, being only too willing to go. It surprised me less, as I saw more of Paris, that Miss Milicent should have had such a twisted sense of her duty whilst living there. It is a city to make one forgetful. There is in it such a tone of living for this world's pleasures. To think of self-denial and self-discipline when walking through the Boulevards, or driving up the Champs Elysées, seems as much out of place as a sermon in a ball-room. No doubt there are very good and earnest people to be found there : it would be extremely uncharitable to say the contrary. But as in London the chief thought seems to be how best to transact worldly business, so in Paris the one ever-present object appears to be how to find worldly amusement.

I dared not sound Mrs Weir as to her wishes for any future plans. I could only divert her mind, and occupy it as best I might for the present, hoping that when John Hervey arrived, I should see my way more clearly. I had written home again, and hoped, now that we were in Paris, I might hear frequently and more regularly, if I set a good example. One disadvantage, however, I found, was likely to arise from being moderately within reach of England. I was not as before free from Mrs Temple's interference. She wrote to me almost immediately on my arrival in Paris, complaining that I did not consult her, or tell her anything, and calling herself very ill-used. In return I reminded her that I had given her all general information, and for medical particulars begged to refer her to Dr Green, to whom I had written fully. Mrs Temple was one of those persons who can only be controlled by men. There was a hint, almost a threat, at the end of one of her letters, that if I was not more communicative, she should think it her duty to follow us to Paris to see how matters were going on ; but I would not dwell upon the idea, hoping it was only a mode of venting her irritation.

A thankful day it was for me when I heard that John Hervey might be expected in Paris the next evening. The news came in a business-like note to Miss Milicent, and a very great excitement it put her into. She came to me as I was sitting in Mrs Weir's room after breakfast, and beckoned me to the door. 'Here, Ursie! here,' she said in a loud whisper, which I knew Mrs Weir particularly disliked. 'What is to be done? He is coming. I am not prepared to see him ; you must settle it.'

I left the room, closing the door behind me. 'John Hervey, do you mean, Miss Milicent?' I said.

'Yes; come here, Ursie,' and she drew me into a tiny bedroom, originally meant for a dressing-room, the chief furniture of which, besides the bed, consisted of a large black trunk. 'You see, I have said nothing to my father; and what is to be done with Mr Hervey when he arrives?'

'He will go to an hotel, no doubt,' I said. 'He does not expect to be received here.'

'What folly you talk, Ursie Grant! He could sleep in the passage, if sleeping were all. But who is to begin business with him?'

'You, Miss Milicent,' I said. 'Mr Weir is never out of his room till twelve o'clock. You will have a couple of hours in the morning quite undisturbed.'

She did not wish the difficulty to be surmounted so easily. 'I mightn't be ready for him at that time; and I don't see how I am to explain matters. He had better wait and talk to M. Dalange and Mr Macdonald.'

'That may be necessary. But he must hear some statement from you first, Miss Milicent.'

'Must! must! It is all a mistake, Ursie. You had better never have advised me to send for him.'

She was the most provoking of women; but if driven up into a corner, I knew she would manage for herself, and I was quite resolved not to manage for her; so I merely said that I thought if I were in her place I should make a memorandum of anything I might wish to say or explain to Mr Hervey; and with this suggestion I left her; and soon afterwards she went out with her father. In the evening, however, before I went to bed, she called me again into her room, and holding up a sheet of scrawled paper, exclaimed—'There! it's done; all ready; everything put down. He will understand from this better than any lawyer would explain. And he is a sensible man. He is not like you, Ursie.'

I never so fully comprehended before the lesson to be learned from the practice of birds, when they bring their young ones to the edge of the nest, and, giving them a push, force them to discover the use of their own wings. Miss Milicent was the strangest mixture of wilfulness and dependence I ever met with; but I suspect that all strong points of character have an opposite weakness existing with them.

John Hervey's visit was ostensibly to me. That was a great comfort to me, for it would give me the opportunity of seeing him alone, and hearing all he had to tell me of Sandcombe. When I was not occupied with Mrs Weir, I was beginning to long for home, not merely from anxiety about Jessie, but from a real wish to be there again.

Two days afterwards, he arrived late in the evening. Mrs Weir, being more tired than usual, had gone to bed very early; and I was working in her room, watching till she was asleep. I had my meals in a little room, used by the people of the house for chance purposes, a kind of waiting-room; and I was just expecting to be called down to supper, when Louise came to tell me that a stranger wished to speak to me. I motioned to her to take my place, and ran down-stairs. It was a new joy to me to meet a friend in that foreign land, and I rushed into the room, exclaiming,—‘O Mr Hervey, this is pleasant!’ and holding out both my hands, gave his such a hearty shake for welcome, as I am sure they never received from me before. He was much quieter than I was; but I could not think him unkind, for he asked so anxiously how I was, and whether I was much worried, and was evidently so interested about me. Yet I did not inquire in return what kind of journey he had had, which was very selfish in me, but I began upon Sandcombe news directly, making him laugh as he answered me, by every now and then bursting into the middle of a sentence with the exclamation—‘I am so glad to see you. I don't think I was ever so glad to see a friend before.’

‘And so you have not brought me anything from Roger,’ I said at last, after there was a moment's pause. ‘I think he might have written.’

‘He has not so much time as he used to have,’ was the reply. ‘He is turning quite into a gay man, Ursie.’

‘Not with his own consent,’ I said.

‘Well! I don't know, if a man and his wife, as they say, are one. And what is a poor fellow in Roger's case to do?’ John Hervey did not speak lightly, though the words might have sounded so.

‘Roger is strong enough to be master,’ I said; ‘and he ought to be.’

‘It is not so easy as you think, Ursie, to be that; especially when a man has once set out on a wrong tack; you won't mind my saying that.’

‘Not at all,’ I replied, and in fact I felt relieved, and added: ‘it has been in my thoughts, Mr Hervey, longer than you may think, though I have not said anything.’

‘I was sure of it; Mrs Kemp, and Mary, and I, were talking only the other evening, and saying that if you were at home we were sure you would be vexed.’

‘But why does not Mrs Kemp write to me?’ I exclaimed; ‘I begged her to do so.’

‘I can’t exactly say why, seeing I don’t know what you told her to write about; but what she would most likely have to tell, Ursie, would be things better explained by word of mouth than by letter. They might be made too much of if they were written down.’

‘I dread trifles,’ I said.

‘So do I,’ was his reply, ‘especially between a man and his wife in the first year of their married life. They are both exploring in unknown lands, and it’s an anxious thing to look on and see which way the discoveries are tending, whether to happiness or the contrary.’

‘Roger’s discoveries seemed all satisfactory when I left home,’ I said.

‘Perhaps they were, I don’t say they are not so now. But, Ursie, I do think that Roger must be surprised to find what a taste his wife has for gaieties, and it’s a good thing he does not hear the remarks I hear about it.’

‘People are extremely ill-natured,’ I said. ‘When a woman is married, she is expected to alter her tastes and become domestic and stay at home all at once. Now, any one may know that such sudden changes are not in human nature.’

‘And men might do well to consider that before they marry,’ said John, thoughtfully. ‘No offence to our friend, Roger, Ursie, than whom a better man does not live. But, I own, it does fret me to hear observations made about his wife which, if they were made about my sister, if I had one, I should shut her up.’

I started. ‘Remarks made upon Jessie!’ I exclaimed. ‘Is she really so imprudent? O Mr Hervey! this is far worse than I had imagined.’

‘Now, don’t be so hasty,’ he answered, laughing a little. ‘I did not say anything, or, at least, mean anything, which you need take such fright at. I am so particular myself, that to hear a sister of mine called flighty would be enough to make me turn the key upon her, and say, “Stay at home, because you are not

fit to go out ;” but that is not the way of the world, you know, Ursie ; and young women in the present day have very free-and-easy fashions, and yet after a time come all right.’

‘I hate their fashions,’ I exclaimed ; ‘for a woman to bring herself into such notice by dress, or manner, or action, let the thing be ever so innocent in itself, is detestable.’

‘I quite agree with you,’ he said ; ‘and all that I meant about Jessie was, that she does manage to do things which draw such notice. Her dress is one point, and I heard Mrs Kemp say she did think she should mention that to you. It is my belief that somehow or other your sister-in-law takes the patterns after Mrs Price ; any way, I know that when I saw her in church last Sunday I did not know her, she had such a showy look, and Roger was quite grave when some one joked him about it.’

‘She is too silly,’ I replied ; ‘she has always been a perfect baby about dress, taking to every new fashion as it came out, and never once considering how unfitting it might be.’

‘There is one thing graver than all, though,’ said John, ‘as we have stumbled upon the subject. I didn’t mean to worry you about it, only’——

‘Tell me everything,’ I exclaimed ; ‘let me know the worst.’

‘How impatient you are ! Not at all changed for being in France,’ said John, laughing. ‘You may probably know as much as I do, for it concerns the past more than the present.’

‘The past !’ I said ; ‘what past ? What do you mean ? I know nothing.’

‘Indeed !’ he replied. ‘Not that Jessie was writing letters to Mr Macdonald, and encouraging him, up to the very day she accepted Roger ?’

‘To the best of my knowledge,’ I replied, ‘she refused Mr Macdonald flatly, and afterwards never had anything to do with him, except going over to Dene occasionally with Miss Milicent.’

‘The world does not say so,’ answered John, gravely.

‘Then the world tells falsehoods, as it always does,’ I replied.

‘I wouldn’t have you be so sure of that,’ he answered. ‘It is said that Mr Macdonald has letters of hers in his possession, and that he shows them about as a proof of her having jilted him.’

I did not start then, or even speak ; I sat quite still, for I felt stunned.

‘Have I troubled you so very much ?’ said John, looking

much distressed. 'I thought, to be sure, you knew everything, and Roger too. Many girls will flirt with one man, and then turn round and marry another; though I can say nothing to excuse them. But, of course, in such a case people will talk.'

'Talk!' I exclaimed, and the sound of my voice was, even to my own ears, sharpened by anger and misery. 'Talk of Roger's wife! O Mr Hervey! is it to be borne?'

'Ursie, you must be reasonable,' he said, and his tone, though kind, was severe. 'I will tell you nothing if you will not use common sense to control yourself. I had not the least idea of raising such a storm.'

'You don't know,' I replied, 'you can little imagine what may come from all this. Jessie a jilt! Think what Roger would say!'

'I don't like to think,' he said. 'But no one can undo the past. What I really want to explain to you is the state of things at present.'

'I don't want explanation,' I replied, proudly. 'I scorn the opinion of the world. Let Jessie have been what she may, she is as true in heart to her husband now as the most model wife that ever breathed.'

'So say I,' replied John, 'so says Mrs Kemp, so say all who really know her. But the world will not judge her so kindly, Ursie, when it sees her seeking the company of such persons as Mrs Price and her friends,—walking with them in Hove, joining them after church,—and this besides going out visiting far more than people are used to in our neighbourhood, and dressing in a way which even quiet Mrs Richardson has been heard to lament as setting a bad example. A woman's character before marriage follows her afterwards, Ursie, as you yourself will be inclined to allow; and people who declare that Jessie was a flirt and a jilt—it grieves me to use the words, though I only tell you what I hear—before she became Roger's wife, still look askance at her; especially when Mr Macdonald goes about talking of all that went on with him, and Mrs Price is heard to lament that her poor little friend has made a mistake.'

'They are mean, miserable, revengeful,' I exclaimed. 'There is no truth nor honour in them.'

'I don't think there is,' he replied. 'I am quite sure, indeed, from things I have heard, that Mr Macdonald speaks ill of her from spite and wounded vanity. He does not choose to let it be believed that another was really preferred to him.'

‘And Mrs Price is spiteful also,’ I said. ‘She had reckoned upon Jessie as one of her own set, and she is provoked with her for having married out of it; and now she is resolved to have her back again, whether it is Roger’s will or not. I don’t care for them, Mr Hervey. I don’t care for the world, or its opinions, or its talk, except with the anger of a moment. What I do care for is’——

‘Roger,’ said John, and his voice trembled, I thought, with kindly sympathy. I would not look towards him; I could not bear him to see my tears. ‘You have been more Roger’s wife in devotion to him than Jessie has been,’ he added, ‘though her love may be great now.’

I paused to reply. An indescribable yearning for affection—a sense of wasted feelings—oppressed me. It was something with which I could not trust myself, and I turned from the subject abruptly, and said, ‘We must talk now of Mrs Weir; we have said enough of Sandcombe.’

All John Hervey’s thoughtful tenderness of manner vanished, I could not tell why. He became the straightforward, prudent man of business; and in a few moments we were as deep in the intricacies and difficulties of Mrs Weir’s affairs as though Roger and Jessie, Sandcombe and Dene, had existed only in fiction.

CHAPTER LXX.

MISS MILICENT would not see John Hervey that evening, and I was half afraid that she might take it into her head again to make some excuse the next morning; but she came to me soon after eight o’clock, prepared, as she said, to go into all particulars. I think her resolution had been strengthened by hearing that M. Dalange might be in Paris almost immediately. She wished me to be present at the interview; but I declined. My position in the family was already sufficiently awkward. I had more authority than could properly have belonged to me under ordinary circumstances, and it was a perpetual effort to me to keep my place so as not to create ill-will. I was more especially particular as regarded money matters. What I had done already was entirely on the plea of Mrs Weir’s health, for which I felt myself responsible. I had

no business to interfere in any other way, and I had already made John Hervey aware of the danger I dreaded from Miss Milicent's imprudence, so that he would be quite sufficiently on his guard.

The interview was a very long one. I began to be fidgety as it drew near to twelve o'clock, lest Mr Weir should come out of his room, and be roused by the sight of a stranger; but, just as the clock struck, the door of the salon opened, and John Hervey ran down-stairs, whilst Miss Milicent went to her room. That augured no satisfaction on her part; if she had been pleased, she would have come at once to tell me.

Mr Weir had his breakfast, and read his letters. I happened to go into the room at the time, and remarked that he looked troubled. He spoke to me hastily, and desired me to tell Miss Milicent to be ready for him in ten minutes. This was an excuse for going to her, which I was glad to have. She heard my message without making any reply; but as I was going away, she called me back again.

'You are dying to know, Ursie. I wish you would speak out and say what you want. Your John Hervey and I have had a quarrel.'

I replied that I had fancied as much.

'Yes; we have had a quarrel, and we may have many more before we have done. He talks law to me, and I can't endure law.'

'Only, unfortunately, Miss Milicent, we are all forced to do so,' I said.

'I don't choose to be forced. I never have attended to it yet, and I don't see why I am to begin now. It may be law, but it isn't justice, Ursie Grant, that a woman should not have the control of her own money.'

'And how can Mr Hervey interfere?' I asked.

'He says there are trustees. I don't care for trustees. When my old aunt left me my money, she meant me to do what I liked with it, for she was very fond of me. She always gave me five shillings at Christmas, and half-a-crown at Easter, and she never dreamed of my being worried in this way.'

'But if Mr Hervey tells you the truth, Miss Milicent,' I replied, 'you will scarcely be angry with him.'

'I don't see that. When the doctor gives you a dose of medicine, you are not obliged to him, and, ten to one, but you would throw it away if you could.'

‘Not quite,’ I answered. ‘I take it, though I dislike it.’

‘Well! and so have I taken what John Hervey says. I listened to him like a lamb; but I told him I didn’t believe a word he said; and I mean to talk to my father about it.’

This would indeed produce a storm. I trembled for the consequences of my advice when I thought how it might affect Mrs Weir. ‘Is Mr Hervey coming here again, Miss Milicent?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know. He will be of little use if he does come. What am I to say to M. Dalange?’

‘That you can have nothing to do with his schemes, I imagine.’

‘Very well for you to say, Ursie,’ was her answer; ‘but if you have to save a father from ruin’—her voice trembled, and she stopped.

It was very true. In my interest for Mrs Weir I forgot the claims of the other parent, and I longed to see John again, that I might hear from himself what advice he had given. From Miss Milicent I could expect nothing but vagueness. She went out with her father, and left me alone with Mrs Weir. It was a very cold day, and the wood fire, though bright and cheerful, did not thoroughly heat the apartment like one of English coal. Mrs Weir sat hovering over it. I could not make her warm, though I wrapped her in shawls, and rubbed her feet and hands. She only allowed me to do this for a little while, and said she was afraid I should tire myself. ‘And it is not well to be waited upon so much, Ursula,’ she added; ‘so you had better go out and leave me.’

‘I have not read to you to-day, dear ma’am,’ I replied. ‘Perhaps if you would let me do that you would be better.’

‘No; not now, thank you. I am cold, Ursula. People in Paris are always cold. They said so when I was young. It was a long time ago. I came to Paris then, and I had a little sister, and she came too, and somebody else came. But I wish to do my duty to my husband, and so I am with him. If he wishes to go back, I shall go back too.’

There was a connection of ideas in the speech, incoherent though it was. I, who knew her history, could trace it, and I thought I would try the experiment of taking her back to those old times. ‘Were you a large party, ma’am,’ I said, ‘when you first came to Paris?’

‘There were five of us, Ursula; my father, and my mother,

and my sister, and—my husband doesn't like his name mentioned, so you won't ask me about him. But Paradise is a happy place. He must be quite at home there now, for he has been there a long time.'

'It won't be very long before we shall all be at home there, I hope, dear ma'am,' I said.

'Not long;—no; and Mr Richardson said, one day, I need not be afraid, and I don't think I am. But, Ursula, I should like to be thankful as I ought; for you know heaven is a gift.'

'It is not easy to be thankful aright, I am afraid, ma'am,' I said; 'many care so much more for earth than they do for heaven.'

'Is it so?' and Mrs Weir looked up at me with an air of momentary wonder. 'They cannot know what it is. Ursula, do you ever think how pleasant the angels' language will be?'

Think! alas! that future existence in which Mrs Weir already lived, was to me—busy, and anxious, and interested in the things of this life—still far, far off. I laid my hand upon hers, and said: 'Dear ma'am, I have never learned to think as I ought, though you have often tried to teach me, but if you will tell me now about the angels' language, I am sure I shall be glad to listen.'

'Oh no,' she replied, sadly, but very gently. 'It cannot be told, it can only be thought about. My mind wanders when with you, Ursula. It never wanders with my Saviour, only sometimes it grows so mournful because He suffered, and had no help, and no one thanked Him. And then I do not quite know about my life now; I cannot think, and I forget; yet I still talk to Him; and if my head is confused He understands. But I should like the angels' language. They must always tell quite what they mean, and I cannot.'

Mrs Weir passed her hand over her eyes, and a painful look of bewilderment rested on her features. Yes, she was confused, troubled,—life was a misty perplexity to her; yet through it all, the Love which is the one great, enduring reality, was growing, and strengthening, and gathering into itself every other feeling,—even that which had been the blissful dream of her youth. She was urgent with me that I should go out; and, finding that I really could be of no material use to her for the next hour or two, I consented, as I had really seen very little of Paris, and the woman of the house had promised to take me to the Hôtel de Ville, and several other places which she said were worth seeing.

A greater contrast could not have existed than between the quietness and sacredness of Mrs Weir's room, with the society of one whose thoughts were dwelling with the angels, and the gay crowd which thronged the streets of Paris. I was amazed : I could not help being so, and for the time I was engrossed by the scene. Now, I doubt if I could be, under similar circumstances ; but those were comparatively young days, and life, with all its trials, and even some at the moment very pressing, was full of novelty and excitement in that foreign land.

CHAPTER LXXI.

WE went to the Hôtel de Ville, and the Church of Notre Dame, and afterwards to the Palais de Justice and the Sainte Chapelle. My eyes were dazzled with bright colours, and I was almost tired of saying, 'How beautiful!' for I had never seen anything in England that could be in the least compared to the grandeur and richness of the buildings in Paris. But my mind was a little distracted by the thought of John Hervey. I did so very much wish to see him, and hear from his own lips what had passed in his interview with Miss Milicent. I looked for him at every turn, fancying I should know his English face and figure at any distance ; but it was a useless search, and I had given up the wish as foolish, when just as we were ascending the steps leading to the Palais de Justice, a party came up whom I recognised as Mr Weir, Miss Milicent, and, I thought, M. Dalange. I don't know that I was exactly surprised to see them. M. Dalange had been expected every day, but I very much disliked meeting him, and I hurried forward with my companion, hoping the others would go into the Sainte Chapelle, and that I might in that way lose sight of them. But the Sainte Chapelle did not appear to be their object. Miss Milicent and her father remained in the open space in front of the Palais de Justice. M. Dalange came up the steps, hurried by me without noticing me, and went—where I could not tell. It was along a passage, and through a door, but he was evidently at home in the place, and his visit had nothing to do with sight-seeing. The Palais de Justice did not interest me very much, and it seemed as if we were intruding

amongst the lawyers, but I still lingered, being unwilling to encounter Mr Weir and Miss Milicent. In about five minutes, M. Dalange appeared again. I saw him go down the steps, and watched him talking eagerly to Mr Weir, and then they seemed to turn upon Miss Milicent, who looked very eager and excited. After a while they left the place, and I thought I saw Miss Milicent and Mr Weir get into a cab, but I was not quite sure. I had not yet been into the Sainte Chapelle, and I was told that it was more worth seeing than anything in Paris, so very richly ornamented with beautiful colours and gilding; but—I don't know why it was—the sight of the persons whom I had just been watching, had rather destroyed my pleasure, and I felt as though I did not care for the Sainte Chapelle. My thoughts dwelt more upon Miss Milicent, left to be worked upon by those men. She seemed to me entangled in a net, and I half regretted not having gone up to her, that at least she might have had the opportunity of speaking, if there was anything amiss. I stood looking at the spot from which I fancied the carriage had driven off, and without turning my head made an observation as I thought to my companion, when to my surprise and satisfaction, it was answered by the friendly voice of John Hervey. 'Ursie, here alone !'

'No, not alone,' I answered, pointing to my friend; 'but where did you come from? I have been looking for you all the morning. This seems quite a meeting place. Mr Weir and Miss Milicent and M. Dalange have just been here.'

'Who? Not that rogue, Dalange?'

'Yes,' I said; 'I am sure I was not mistaken.' John moved as though he would have rushed away from me, but he stopped short.

'How long have they been gone? which way did they go?'

'They are but just gone, not two minutes. Mr Weir, I think, was in a cab with Miss Milicent. Look, in that direction, to the right. What are you so anxious about?'

'I did not expect M. Dalange so soon,' he said; 'and Miss Milicent is so ignorant, she knows nothing whatever of money matters. They will get every penny from her, and it is all a fraud, a monstrous fraud.'

'But she can't do anything without the consent of the trustees,' I said. 'You told her that yourself.'

'But these men may make her take responsibilities upon herself which the trustees can't refuse to acknowledge. I talked to

her, Ursie, this morning, till I was hoarse. She was mad with me; but I would make her hear me, and I hoped I had stopped the thing for the time. I have been writing this very day to one of the trustees, who is a lawyer, begging him to interfere.'

'That will only make matters worse,' I said; 'the very name of a lawyer makes her angry.'

'Then she must go her own way,' he said. 'If it is to ruin, it must be so.'

'No,' I exclaimed, 'it must not be. Mr Hervey, you must stop her;' and I caught his arm as he was turning away from me.

He stood in silent thought.

'For her mother's sake,—for mine. O Mr Hervey! it is very near my heart.'

'Everything is near your heart, Ursie,' he exclaimed, 'except—but you wish it—I will try, though I have no hope;' and so he left me.

I entered the Sainte Chapelle. It was wonderfully beautiful, but I had not the heart to enjoy it. I felt thoroughly disappointed. John Hervey's coming was of no use, and the counsel which I had thought so wise, so sure to bring everything right, had failed. I became entirely desponding, and went back to the lodgings, prepared to find that all I most feared with respect to Mrs Weir had occurred, that Mr Weir had taken advantage of my absence to press upon her those unfortunate business matters, and that, in consequence, the work of weeks had been wholly undone. But Mrs Weir was lying quietly on the sofa, and Louise sitting by her at work. Mr Weir and Miss Milicent, I was told, had not returned, but the dinner was nearly ready, and it was supposed they would be in almost immediately. Soon afterwards, as I was in my room, I heard Miss Milicent come up-stairs, but she went directly to her own apartment, and locked the door. That was about half-past five. We waited till six, seven, half-past seven, still Mr Weir did not appear, and Miss Milicent's answer, when we knocked at her door to ask about him, was that she knew nothing, she did not want any dinner, she had a headache; and still no one was admitted to her apartment. Mrs Weir was aware of something unusual, for her husband generally paid her a visit of a few minutes every day before dinner. This day of course she missed him, but she was satisfied on being told that he must have had some engagement to detain him. I was thankful that she remained so quiet, but I

began to be uneasy myself ; and I could not prevail upon Miss Milicent to admit me to her room, or to give any answer to what was asked, except that she would not be disturbed. I persuaded Mrs Weir to go to bed early. She inquired several times for her husband, but, like a child, was satisfied as soon as the slightest reason was given for his non-appearance. Miss Milicent opened her door to take in a cup of coffee and a roll, but this was all. I was sure that something painful had occurred, but all my trust lay in John Hervey. Whatever it might be, he would surely come to tell me of it, and I listened to every footstep on the stairs, and every noise of an opening door, thinking there would be some tidings of him. Louise went to bed. I sat up. Latterly I had slept on a little sofa in Mrs Weir's room. She was often restless at night, and I was afraid to leave her alone. It must have been half-past ten o'clock, and I was thinking whether I ought not to summon courage once more to apply to Miss Milicent to throw some light upon the mystery, when I did really hear sounds of an arrival, talking at the foot of the stairs, questions and answers, and one voice,—I thought I could not be deceived, yet I listened several times before I could feel sure—it was certainly Mrs Temple's.

The sinking of my heart, the trembling nervousness which came over me, caused me to catch hold of the nearest chair, as though seized with faintness. Before I could recover myself, Miss Milicent was standing in the passage, like myself, listening. She saw me, and seizing me by the arm, dragged me into her room, and again locked the door.

'Ursie Grant, is it she? You have sent for her, you are in league with her,' and she looked at me with fierce anger.

'I don't understand you, Miss Milicent,' I said. 'I believe it is Mrs Temple ; but why she is come, I know no more than yourself.'

'But you wrote to her.'

'No, indeed,' I said.

'Then John Hervey did ; some one must have told her.'

'No one,' I replied, 'that I am aware of. And, Miss Milicent, you know she has been threatening to come for the last week.'

'But just now,—to triumph over me,—to get me under her power ! Ursie, I won't bear it.'

It was all a mystery, and I had no time to inquire into it, for a servant came to say that Mrs Temple was in the salon.

I drew back for Miss Milicent to pass before me ; but she

seated herself on the black trunk, folded her arms, and said quietly, 'I shall not go.'

'But, indeed, Miss Milicent,' I observed, 'if you will excuse me for saying so, you must. It is not my place to receive Mrs Temple.'

'I don't move. You may go and tell her what she wants to know, and send her away.'

'I have nothing to tell,' I replied. 'Miss Milicent, you have kept us all sadly in suspense.'

'Kept you in suspense,' she exclaimed. 'Ursie, you are pretending; it is your plan. You know as well as I do that we are all gone to ruin again; and that my father is off. John Hervey may have meant well, but he has acted cruelly.'

'It is no plan of mine,' I said, trying not to be angry at her accusation. 'I know nothing, though I can guess something. John Hervey told me that the speculation of M. Delange was a fraud, and I suppose he has interfered to stop it.'

'Interfered by French law!' she exclaimed, 'which is no better than English. The man may be in prison now for aught I know to the contrary; perhaps it may be the best place for him; but my father is off again, and now you may go and tell Matilda Temple that, and let her rejoice over it.'

She stood up and pointed to the door with an air which was almost dignified in its proud bitterness. I could not urge my point further. The key was turned as soon as I had left the apartment, and I had to face Mrs Temple alone. As I passed Mrs Weir's room, I looked in. She was sleeping, and oh! how earnestly I prayed that she might be gaining strength for the trials which were awaiting her!

'I was not expected, I perceive,' was Mrs Temple's stiff greeting, as I entered the salon. She had drawn her chair to the fire, and was endeavouring to stir up the dying embers.

'No, ma'am,' I replied, 'you were not expected, and I am afraid you will find it cold. Can anything be got for you? Mr Weir is not at home, and Miss Milicent has a bad headache.'

'I see,' she said, sternly, 'it is as I expected. Young woman, you are to understand that you are no longer mistress in this family. If Milicent Weir is as weakly blind as her mother, I warn you there are others on the watch for her interests, who will not let her be cajoled to ruin by the arts of a cunning girl.' I was taken by surprise, yet I did not lose my calmness. Mrs

Temple's manner and words always had the effect of giving me a feeling of indifference and self-possession.

'I suppose, ma'am,' I said, 'that you refer to myself. If you will have the goodness to explain your meaning, I will answer you as best I may.'

'No doubt you have an answer ready,' she exclaimed; 'but I require actions, not words. I insist upon your instantly giving up the charge of Mrs Weir to me, and making your arrangements for returning to England to-morrow. It is for that purpose I am come.'

'I am afraid it will be impossible to oblige you, ma'am,' I replied; 'I am responsible to Dr Green, who placed me in my present position, and Mr Weir and Miss Milicent also must have a voice in the matter. When they and Mrs Weir wish me to go, I shall be quite ready, indeed glad, to do so, but I could not make any change by myself. And perhaps,' I added, 'you will be good enough to let me know the grounds upon which you wish me to do so.'

'It is easy to pretend ignorance,' she replied; 'but there are proofs which you will find it anything but easy to answer. Do you know this handwriting?' and she produced a portion of a torn letter from her pocket-book, and pushed the candle towards me.

'It is my sister-in-law's handwriting,' I said, feeling very much startled.

'Ah! you own that; perhaps this too will throw some light upon my business.' She showed me another long letter signed 'J. Macdonald,' and pointed to the postscript, 'I enclose a portion of a note from Mrs Grant, which will confirm my assertions.'

I felt the colour forsake my cheeks, and I sat down in the nearest chair, for I trembled all over; but it was not for any cause that Mrs Temple would divine.

She kept her eyes fixed upon me. 'You had better confess at once,' she said. 'You see that I have the power of discerning all your machinations. Your giddy sister-in-law is not likely to keep your secrets from her friends at Dene.'

Angry and agitated though I was, I managed to reply, quietly: 'Whatever my sister-in-law's note may have contained, ma'am, it could be no confidential communication about me, for Jessie has nothing to tell.'

'That may or may not be,' said Mrs Temple, in the same

satirical tone. 'Mrs Grant at least writes to them openly, and tells them your plans, and your address, as you may see for yourself,' and she again put the torn paper into my hand.

My eyes were dim ; everything seemed to swim before me, and it was with difficulty I could make out the words : ' Indeed you must believe that I tell you all I know. Ursula does not say when she shall return home. She is still at the same lodgings in Paris with Mrs Weir, and I do not see how she can leave her. I think but for her they would all go to ruin again, but she manages everything her own way ; even Mr Weir does exactly what she wishes.'

' Mrs Weir is much obliged to you, doubtless,' continued Mrs Temple, scarcely giving me time to finish, ' for managing everything for her, but her friends would like to inquire a little more minutely into the particulars of this management. There have been some singular interferences of late. Mr Hervey, I understand, is in Paris, summoned thither by Milicent Weir. A very singular adviser, certainly. Doubtless that was upon your recommendation.'

I made no direct answer to this last remark. I cared nothing for Mrs Temple's insinuations, nothing at that moment for anything or any person except Roger and Jessie. With the heavy, heavy aching at my heart, I was only anxious to come at once to the root of all this mystery, and so to rid myself of it. Confronting Mrs Temple without shrinking, I answered, ' I can make no reply or explanation as to anything you have said, ma'am, unless you will do me the favour to tell me plainly and openly what it is which you accuse me of, and how you have gained your information. If you decline this, I am afraid I shall be obliged to leave you as it is very late, and I shall be afraid of disturbing Mrs Weir by conversing any longer.'

I suppose she saw from my manner that I was quite determined, and that nothing was to be obtained from me by indirect means, for, in a more hasty and less sarcastic tone, she answered : ' Suspicions are quickly told when they are certainties. I accuse you of using undue influence in this house. I know that you assume the entire control not only of Mrs Weir's income, but of her daughter's ; I know that you have been planning to get Milicent Weir's money into the hands of this man, Hervey, who is a mere land-surveyor and speculator,—for what purpose I do not pretend to say ; but he and you are too well known as acquaintances and friends of long standing not to make it certain

that there is a complete understanding between you. I have reason to believe, moreover, that you are striving to work upon Mrs. Weir's mind in your own favour, and are taking advantage of her insanity, whilst you persist in the assertion that she is in the possession of sound reason. Some of these accusations I make from my own observation and experience ; others I have heard from persons residing in the neighbourhood of Stonecliff, and acquainted with the Mr. Macdonald in whom Milicent Weir has so strangely confided ; and who, as well as Mrs. Price of Dene, is, as every one knows, most intimate with your family, whether to your credit I do not pretend to say.' And with the air of profound Christian charity, Mrs. Temple heaved a deep sigh.

Such a maze of truth and falsehood. I was in complete bewilderment. How was I to extricate myself, and where was I to begin? Mrs. Temple waited patiently, though trying to awe me by severe looks ; at last I said : ' If you please, ma'am, I will refer you to Miss Milicent to-morrow, to explain all things. Perhaps to-night you will be contented to know that Mr. Weir has again got himself into great difficulties, and that Mr. Hervey has helped him out of them. Mr. Weir is not expected home to-night, and if you would wish to have his room I will order it to be made ready for you at once, otherwise I am afraid the people of the house will be gone to bed.'

I never in my life saw any one so angry as Mrs. Temple was then. I believe my quiet indifference exasperated her more than the fiercest storm of passion. I could not repeat all she said, nor even all she did, as she paced up and down the room ; in the midst I heard a shrill cry, like the voice of a terrified child, and, rushing to Mrs. Weir's room, found her in a state of frightful nervous excitement. Happily my first impulse was to lock the door behind me. When I went up to the bedside, the poor lady actually clung to me in alarm. ' She is come back, Ursula, she is come to take me ; I must go. They will shut me up. Oh ! save me.' And then she nearly threw herself out of bed in her fright, and when I forced her back, and made her rest her head on the pillow, she sank into a state of complete exhaustion for a few minutes, only to be roused again to fresh fears. She had heard Mrs. Temple's voice. She must hear it again. I felt there was nothing to be done but to acknowledge the truth, and try to reassure her by saying that I would remain with her, and that no one could take her from me. She made me repeat the words

again and again ; she caught at them as the drowning sailor catches at the plank that is to save him. But Mrs. Temple knocked at the door and inquired how her aunt was, and the nervous horror returned again. What was to be done with her I could not tell. When she was again calm for a few minutes I left her, locking the door on the outside and carrying away the key, and went to call Louise and make her wait upon Mrs. Temple, and then I returned to watch by the bedside. Mrs. Temple, I believe, went to bed, for she did not endeavour to gain admittance again ; probably she felt it would be useless. It was a sad and most anxious night. If the case had been merely physical, I should instantly have sent for medical advice but what could a strange physician do in an illness so complicated and distressing ? Mrs. Weir's pulse was fearfully quick. I trembled lest violent fever might be coming on, but I was afraid to call up Louise or Miss Milicent to ask their opinion as to what should be done, lest Mrs. Temple should insist upon joining in the consultation. Of course I had no rest ; I had not even an hour's quiet watching which might enable me to think over my difficulties, and seek for help in so great anxieties. I could but say a few short prayers from time to time for Mrs. Weir, Miss Milicent, myself, above all—oh, with what depth of earnestness was the petition offered !—for my dear Roger and for Jessie.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THERE was no doubt as to Mrs. Weir's state in the morning. Fever had not only begun, but was increasing rapidly. A physician was sent for before Mrs. Temple was awake. Miss Milicent was thoroughly frightened, and willing to do everything she was told, though in her own peculiar way ; and it was by her representations that I obtained from the physician, what I most desired, a strict command that no fresh person should be admitted to Mrs Weir's room. ' I told him, Ursie,' said Miss Milicent, when relating her interview, ' that Matilda Temple was a Turk, and that the sight of her would throw my mother into convulsions, and that quite decided him. Mrs. Temple was extremely indignant, and threatened all kinds of interference in revenge, but she did not venture to do more ;

and I kept carefully out of her way, and made Miss Milicent take upon herself the part which fitly belonged to her. If this state of things could but last, I felt we might be able to weather the present storm. Miss Milicent, subdued by fright and anxiety, was more able now to give me a rational account of the proceedings of the previous day. In low tones, as she watched by Mrs Weir, who lay tossing on her bed in restless unconsciousness, she informed me that after leaving the Palais de Justice, she, and Mr Weir, and M. Dalange, had gone direct to the hotel where the latter had for the time taken up his abode. There M. Dalange proposed to put before her the state of her father's entanglements, which he declared demanded instant relief. She was not to be called upon to pay down any money at once, but she was only to be guarantee for certain sums which M. Dalange was to advance. She was frightened, and did not know how to refuse, and her father seemed quite desperate when he found she hesitated. They were in the midst of the discussion when they were interrupted by the entrance of John Hervey and a Frenchman, who appeared to have some legal authority. Miss Milicent said she could not understand all that went on, they talked so fast, and M. Dalange got into a violent passion; but he was taken off at last, evidently against his will, and John Hervey then brought her home.

'And what became of Mr Weir?' I said.

'He went off. John Hervey tells me he is gone to Brussels.'

'But was he allowed to go?' I said. 'Was he not in as much danger as M. Dalange?'

'My father is no swindler, Ursie,' replied Miss Milicent, haughtily; 'he may speculate, but it is in good faith. John Hervey says there is no such accusation against him as there is against these Frenchmen; but he is gone. The Frenchman did not know who he was, and had no directions about him, and almost as soon as the fuss began, my father slipped away, and that was the last I saw of him!'

It did not seem very like innocence, yet I felt thankful that Mr Weir was at least saved from more public disgrace.

Miss Milicent was silent after this; she seemed very unwilling to allude to common subjects, and I did not wonder at it. If anything could convince her of the folly of trusting as she had done to her own judgment, I should suppose it would be the present condition of her family affairs; but she would say nothing, not one word of regret or acknowledgment, and when

not actually attending upon her mother, sat brooding over the fire with her hands upon her knees, apparently lost in melancholy reflections. Mrs Temple had a dreary, solitary day, but she showed no symptoms of being tired or of intending to leave us. She remained alone in the salon, working, and reading, and keeping watch, and when the doctor came in the middle of the day, had a long private conference with him. She spoke not one word to me, indeed I scarcely gave her the opportunity of doing so, and her communications with Miss Milicent were very brief. As to myself, I went on from hour to hour doing what was needed, and longing for two things,—one, that I might see John Hervey, and the other, that I might find half an hour's leisure before the post went out to write to Jessie. Neither was granted. No John Hervey came, and as it drew towards the evening, Mrs Weir became much worse, and I could not possibly leave her. The doctor, when he was sent for about eight o'clock, looked very grave. Mrs Temple insisted upon coming into the room, and as Mrs Weir was then quite insensible to what was passing, it did not signify. I think she was shocked by the change that had already taken place; indeed I never saw her so really distressed, but the result was different from my expectation. Instead of declaring, as I had feared, that she would herself be head nurse, she took a sudden fright, and when the physician was gone, summoned Miss Milicent, announced her belief that it was a case of decided infection, and stated that she should leave the house and go to a neighbouring hotel. It may well be believed that no one objected; and when Louise had packed up her things, and seen her set off in a cab to an hotel in the next street, I think we one and all felt as if half the burden of our care was removed.

The next morning brought me letters from home. I read them as I went to lie down in Miss Milicent's room after my night of watching. Weary though I was, every feeling of fatigue, or inclination for sleep, was forgotten in the anxiety with which I opened them. One was from Mrs Kemp, the other from Roger. I put the latter aside. Mrs Kemp wrote as follows :—

‘MY DEAR URSIE,—

‘It has been no want of thought or of love which has kept me from writing, but we have had busy times, with a change of servants, and Mary and I have had a good deal of needlework on

hand, besides other matters, and we wish you had been here to help us. Of course, after your letter, I have tried to have an eye upon Mrs Roger, but she has been here very little, not more than once for the last month, and what I hear I don't take much notice of, though it is not so much to her credit as I could like, and the farmer tells me her name is mentioned in a light way at Hove, which is to be expected if she will be so free with the Dene people. But there is nothing for me to take up or talk about to Roger, though I pity him, poor man! from my heart, and can't help seeing, as everybody else sees, that he has had a grave look of late, which he did not use to have. He is very anxious for his wife that she shouldn't over-fatigue herself, and so he must be the more vexed at her going out so much. She was dining at Dene, I heard say, last week, when Roger went to London for a day or two on business. That does not sound well in itself, besides its being wrong in her to leave William alone. Anyhow, my dear, things will be much better when you are at home, and my plain opinion is, that you have more claim there than you have with poor Mrs Weir, who, they say, scarcely knows one person from another, and who, at any rate, is no relation. You won't mind my saying that, I hope, seeing we are such old friends. One thing which tells against Mrs Roger, in everybody's opinion, is the way Mrs Price talks about her. A person I know heard Mrs Price say in Hove, that her marriage was all a mistake, and that she was very much in love with Mr Macdonald at the time. I contradicted it, because I had heard from you of her having refused him, but people won't believe that, and one person,—I won't mention names for fear of making mischief,—said that Mr Macdonald had letters in his possession which proved that she had jilted him. However, I don't believe all that the world says, and I only tell you, my dear, because you asked me to let you know everything. Now I will only repeat that it will be a happy day for us all, and a very fortunate one for Sandcombe and Mrs Roger, when you are at home again to put things straight; so hoping to see you before long,

‘I remain,

‘Your affectionate friend,

‘ANNE KEMP.

‘*P.S.*—I have forgotten to tell you about Mary; but I take it granted you will hear everything from John Hervey. We like Richard Bennett very much, and are well pleased upon the

whole. Mary says she would rather talk than write ; but she sends you her best love.'

Richard Bennett : who was he ? A new labourer most likely ; but his name came in oddly. I put down the letter and took up Roger's. Just then there was a knock at my door and Louise came to tell me that Mr Hervey was in the salon, and wished to speak to me.

I must have looked like a ghost after my sleepless nights and anxious thoughts ; but I went up to John Hervey with a smile on my face, for my heart was gladdened by the sight of him.

'Are we alone ?' he said, and he looked round uneasily.

'Yes, quite. Mrs Temple is gone, frightened by the thought of infection. Don't look so horrified, it is only her fidget ; but she keeps away. Perhaps, though,' I added, 'you didn't know she was here.'

'Yes, I have seen her. She is mad with you and me, Ursie.'

'Is she ?' I said. 'I can't say that I care. Tell me about Mr Weir.'

'Miss Milicent has given you the story, of course,' he said. 'She promised me she would.'

'Then she did not keep her promise,' I replied. 'She came back and locked herself up in her room, and would say nothing to any one. It was only yesterday morning that I drew a few particulars from her.'

'She is so strange,' he said, 'one never knows how to deal with her. I thought I had made her see the matter rightly. There was no other way of managing it, Ursie. Before I came abroad, I inquired of persons who knew our friend, Mr Macdonald, and this M. Dalange, and I found out quite enough to convince me that they were both as great rogues as one could desire to see, and Miss Milicent's own information as to their proceedings put me on the right scent for discovering more. Since I have been in Paris, a friend has helped me to get at the whole truth. Mr Weir, with all his shrewdness, has been fairly taken in by them. The case is a serious one as regards M. Dalange. He is accused of forgery ; but that does not concern us, only I wanted, if possible, to have the affair put into the hands of the authorities quietly, so as to prevent Miss Milicent's name from being brought forward, and to save Mr Weir from being in any way publicly disgraced. If Miss Milicent had been

less wilful, it might all have been managed ; but at last, as you yourself know, there was no way of saving her from becoming entangled, except by having the Frenchman seized at once. Mr Weir has taken fright, and is off to Brussels. Though said to be innocent, I suspect he feels safer there than in Paris for the present.'

'And have you explained this to Mrs Temple?' I asked. 'She came to Paris, imagining, I actually believe, that you and I were in a plot to cheat Mrs Weir and Miss Milicent out of all their money. I don't know clearly now who put the notion into her head.'

'That man, Macdonald, from what I can understand,' replied John. 'He was mixed up with the French business, and no doubt learned from M. Dalange that you were standing in the way of their getting possession of Miss Milicent's money. At any rate, it was a letter of his, which Mrs Temple showed me, written to a friend of hers who has taken Stonecliff, which made her so alarmed as to what you and I were about, that she came off directly.'

I thought of the scrap in Jessie's handwriting, and longed to know if he had seen that also ; but I could not bring myself to ask.

'This letter,' continued John, 'pretended to be strictly confidential, but said that it was high time that Mrs Weir's friends should interfere to have you recalled.'

'Hypocrite !' I exclaimed ; 'when he himself was working to get everything into his own hands ! But Mrs Temple believed the folly, and that is not much better.'

'It is too absurd to make one angry,' replied John ; 'who can care what such a woman thinks ?'

'You would not say so if you had to deal with her,' I said ; 'she has been a thorn in my side for months.'

'But she will not continue so,' he replied ; 'I must leave Paris this afternoon, and grieve to my heart that you should bear the brunt of this trouble alone ; but it will be over before long, Ursie. Whichever way it ends, you will come back to us, and be happy again.'

The word happy touched me to the quick. I was very silly, but both mind and body were overworked, and I leaned my head upon the table, and my tears fell fast.

He drew near me, and his voice was kind and very soothing. He called me dear Ursie ; he said there were many who loved

me, and rested upon me ; that I was Roger's comfort, and Jessie's guardian angel ; that I deserved happiness, and I must be happy. But my heart was very heavy, and, raising my head, I answered bitterly, as I wiped away my tears, ' Ah, Mr Hervey ! it is easy for you to talk of happiness ; life is bright before you. Mary Kemp will never disappoint you as Jessie has disappointed Roger.'

He drew back. ' Mary Kemp !' he said, ' disappoint me ! I don't understand you, Ursie. Mary Kemp is going to be happy, I trust, but there is no question of disappointment as far as I am concerned.'

' Not when she is to be your wife ?' I replied, and my burst of sorrow ended in a feeling of angry amazement.

' My wife ! Ursie, you are talking wildly. Mary Kemp is engaged to my cousin Richard Bennett. He made an offer to her just before you left England.

A sense of the ridiculous seized me, and feeling too weak to control myself, I laughed almost hysterically. But John Hervey stood by me quite grave and silent.

' Richard Bennett, I thought he was a labourer !' was my exclamation, as soon as I could recover my breath. ' No wonder I was puzzled. But, Mr Hervey, what has all the mystery been ? Farmer Kemp, and Mary, and Mrs Kemp have all misled me. What have you had to do with the matter ?'

' Merely,' he replied, in the same grave tone, ' that there was a difficulty as usual about money matters. Richard Bennett is a clerk in a counting-house with a very good prospect of rising ; but his salary was not sufficient, so the farmer thought, to insure Mary's having a comfortable home, and I managed to have it increased. Mary is indebted to me for this, and nothing more. I can't think how you could have made such a mistake, Ursie,' he added, a little bitterly, ' you always spoke as if you understood, and it must have struck you as strange that I never talked about Mary.'

' We have scarcely seen each other lately, if you remember,' I said ; ' and I am afraid I was too much engrossed in my own affairs to think much about it. It was very selfish of me,' I added, for my heart reproached me ; ' but, indeed, Mr Hervey, setting aside Mrs Weir, there are other cares which may be my excuse. And then I had never heard of Mr Bennett. He is like a man from another world.'

' He saw Mary six months ago,' replied John, ' and said

nothing, because he had nothing to offer. But Mary, as it seems, lost her heart to him, and when he did propose, the thing was soon settled.'

'And you have not been in love with Mary all your life, then?' I asked.

He looked at me with an expression so wondering, earnest, and anxious, it seemed to thrill through me. 'O Ursie!' he said, 'have you thought it possible?' He paused, Mrs Weir's bell rang, and I rushed out of the room.

John Hervey loved me! I suppose there is no woman to whom such a consciousness comes for the first time, without some feeling of pleasurable excitement; but the next moment, in my case, brought a pang of deep and most painful regret. The feeling was not returned. Yet my heart beat quickly,—my head was dizzy with emotion; and, as I entered Mrs Weir's chamber, I could scarcely summon sufficient presence of mind to answer Miss Milicent's hasty question, whether Mr Hervey had brought any tidings of her father.

'I think, if you please, you had better go and ask,—he will tell you everything, and I can wait here,' I said; and I hurriedly took my place at the bedside, and motioned to Miss Milicent that I was willing to remain. She left me, and I was alone, able to think. Yes, he did love me; I saw it clearly as though written before me. I traced the feeling through the course of years. I felt that it had been constant and increasing. I knew that there were times, when, unconsciously to myself, I might even have given it encouragement. And I was excited, flattered, grateful, but I had nothing except gratitude to offer in return. John Hervey had not been the idol of my imagination, I had bestowed but few thoughts upon him. His presence or absence gave me nothing but a passing pleasure or pain. It seemed cold and cruel. I thought I had deluded him, and I pictured to myself his disappointment, and longed—no one can tell how earnestly—to comfort him. Just for an instant, it even crossed my mind whether we might not be happy together, for as a friend I could have rested upon him, and found pleasure and support in his society. My dread of giving him pain was so great, that I could have made any personal sacrifice to avoid it. And life with John Hervey as a companion, would never be unhappy. But there was something required beyond this, and the very effort I made to think of him as my husband proved that it could never be my duty to accept him.

And then I smiled scornfully at myself as I remembered that I was thinking of rejection before the offer had been received. It was unmaidenly and unwomanly. But no ; it was not so. I was but facing that which I believed to be a truth, and which, if I returned to say good-bye, would, I felt assured, be expressed. One moment, if I had remained, and I should have heard the full outpouring of his feelings, and have been called upon to accept or reject him. I have heard that there are some women who look upon such events as triumphs, and who, in the gratification of their vanity, forget the pain they are inflicting, and rejoice in the opportunity, for once afforded them, of placing themselves in a position superior to men. God knows, I say it in all sincerity, I am in no wise freer from vanity, or more thoughtful or tender-hearted than the generality of my sex ; and yet this feeling of triumph is one into which I could never enter. A man's grief is so very terrible to witness, and surely there is nothing but exceeding pain, in seeing those to whom nature bids one look up, humbled, under any circumstances, whether of pain of body or anguish of mind. It is a false position, and as such it can never be a rightful cause for triumph. But be this as it may, I had received from Mrs Weir, years before, a counsel which now came to my aid, and which would alone have been sufficient to guide me as to the course I was to pursue. 'Remember, Ursie,' she once said to me, when talking of the possible difficulties of my future life, 'if it should ever happen that you perceive the affection of a worthy man before he has declared it, and find yourself so circumstanced that you cannot accept him, save him, if possible, the pain of being rejected, by never giving him occasion to make the offer. It may be less flattering to yourself, but it is more generous to him.' I had but little time for thought now. I expected Miss Milicent every instant to return, but my resolution, though made hastily, was not, I hope, therefore, unwise. I would not see John Hervey again, and I took up a piece of paper, and wrote instead.

'MY DEAR MR HERVEY,

'I am so very tired, having been up all night, that I really think I must go and lie down, and not wait till you and Miss Milicent have finished your conversation. Please not to think it unkind. I hope you will have a pleasant journey. Give them all my best love at home. I do trust to be there before long.

'Yours very sincerely,

'URSULA GRANT.'

It was painfully cold, almost ungracious, after the interest he had taken in me, but I felt as though the very coldness was his safeguard. If he could be quite assured of my indifference, his thoughts would turn into another channel, and, young as I was, I had had sufficient experience to be aware that the food of love is hope. Destroy the one, and the other will most probably die. How anxiously I listened after Louise had taken the note, very much fearing that he would insist upon seeing me again,—and yet, womanlike, longing to be forced into saying something more kind; and how, afterwards, when I heard Miss Millicent speak to him in the lobby, and counted his footsteps descending the stairs, a perverse, injured feeling took possession of me, and I alternately blamed myself for the foolish vanity of my suspicions, and accused him of wounded pride for having so quickly accepted my note, every one who knows the weaknesses and inconsistencies of the human heart will easily imagine. Anyhow, the deed was done. I was never to know his feelings, and vanity must from thenceforth be contented to sleep in ignorance, whether the love that had been rejected was a truth or an imagination.

I do not know whether it may appear selfish or unnatural, but it was not till John Hervey had left the house,—as I learned from Miss Millicent, without any word of remembrance or question as to my plans,—that I recollected I had still an unopened letter from Roger to read. Then, as I once more sat alone in my chamber, with an indescribable feeling of dreariness and disappointment at my heart, I opened it, and in a few moments I was transported back to Sandcombe, satisfied, quite satisfied, that I had done rightly.

‘MY DEAREST URSIE,—

‘I have not written to you lately, because I have been constantly expecting you home. We none of us thought, when you left us, that you would be away so long. I don’t wish to hurry you, or make you uncomfortable, but I want very much to see you. When I was in Canada I did not mind being away from you so much, because it was necessity, and you were coming out to join me; but Sandcombe is different, and there are a good many things about which we should like your opinion. It may look selfish to write in this way, when you are so usefully employed, and I had a battle with myself before I made up my mind to say anything, but I don’t speak for myself only, though

I could do so. We lived so many years together, dear Trot, and they were very happy ones. Women are said to have braver hearts than men, and I begin to think it must be true, for you can do better without me than I can without you. I am a man of few words, and very often I can't say things when I wish to do so; but you have been a chief blessing to me, and may God reward you for it, and make you happy. I am afraid at times I have vexed you, especially of late; but there's been no lack of love. I sorely want you home.' The rest of the letter contained merely some details about the farm and housekeeping, but Jessie's name was not once mentioned.

Leave Roger and Sandcombe, and marry John Hervey! If the most devoted love that ever mortal felt had been offered me in compensation, I could not then have accepted it. There was a tone in Roger's letter, a quiet, sober sadness, which spoke to me of his disappointment far more than words. It was only disappointment; there was no anxiety. If there had been he would have mentioned it openly, for he hated mysteries; but it was a sadness which I fancied he did not himself comprehend, and which he seemed to turn to me to explain and soothe. He was very childlike in some of his ways, at least with those whom he quite knew and trusted; his expressions of affection were always so simple and straightforward, and his penitence was the same. When he did anything wrong, or which he considered wrong, he owned it in a few words, and always without any excuses. I felt now as though he was no match for Jessie; as if, with all his manliness and sense, and knowledge of worldly things, he was too innocent and true to be on his guard against the deception of a woman's weak, vain heart, and the gentler feelings which I had lately bestowed upon Jessie were turned into bitterness, as I thought once more how unworthy she was of him.

The letter shown me by Mrs Temple! I had not forgotten it, though with the incessant press upon my mind I had as yet found no leisure to determine what should be done about it. I did not choose to ask questions about it, and so expose myself again to Mrs Temple's unkind remarks. But I could not make up my mind to whom it was addressed, or for what purpose it had been written. Though it had been sent to Mrs Temple through Mr Macdonald, it was most probably part of some communication made to Mrs Price. However that might be, it so increased my distrust of Jessie's prudence and openness, that I think it would

have driven me home at all hazards, if I had not felt that the time was past when her folly could do harm to others, whatever it might to herself.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

MRS WEIR'S fever increased, and she was in great danger. We watched her incessantly for many days. At last she was so ill that we gave up all hope. Then there came a sudden change, and she sank to sleep and awoke exhausted, so that life could scarcely be discovered, yet calm and conscious—conscious that she was dying. For there was no thought in any of us that she would recover, and I may add, indeed, no hope, except--yes—Miss Milicent hoped. If ever there was a bitter wakening to the knowledge of neglected duties, and a wish to make amends, in the heart of any human being, it was in hers during that period of troubled watching. We were alone in the midst of the crowded world of Paris, without visitors or friends, for Mrs Temple's suspicious guardianship was lessened by her fears, and wishing apparently to have no excuse for communication with what she considered an infected house, she had left Paris, and stationed herself at St Germain's, to be within reach whenever any change should take place. One letter had been received from her father by Miss Milicent. In it Mr Weir made some general inquiries for his wife, and said that he was still for the present at Brussels. And now that Mrs Weir's consciousness had returned, the difficulty was how to communicate the fact that he had again left her. This, however, was not so difficult a task as I had feared. It seems as though God were pleased at times to bestow at the close of life a singular quietness of mind and forgetfulness of worldly anxieties to those who have long striven to please Him. And of one thing I am quite certain, that the habits of self-control and acquiescence in His will which are attained, it may be, only through long struggle, and with a constant sense of defeat, whilst the spirit is in its full energy, bring forth their perfect fruit in hours of weakness, being ripened into fulness by the sunshine of God's more abundant grace. Mrs Weir, from her nervous, susceptible

temperament, her disappointments and sorrows, had passed a troubled life; repose had been a blessing unknown to her. Even when externally there was little to disturb her, her over-scrupulous conscience, and her little whims and peculiarities, had been a fertile source of unhappiness. But she had battled with these temptations. For years she had sought to control herself, to suffer patiently, and to feel that 'in quietness and confidence must be her strength;' and, latterly, forced more vigorously into the conflict by Mrs Temple's ignorance of the human heart and natural severity of character, she had brought herself to a degree of self-denial and self-control which it was even painful to witness. I thought it hard upon her at the time, and, notwithstanding the result, I would not for worlds inflict the same penance myself, neither would I advise any other persons to attempt such a course of discipline. There are certain drugs which are dangerous poisons in our own hands, though healing medicines in the hands of a wise physician; and so there are chastisements and trials which, brought upon us by God's Providence, work for our eternal good, whilst, if inflicted by our own will, they tend to spiritual pride and narrowness of mind. If the life which Mrs Weir led under Mrs Temple's government had been marked out by her own conscience, it would probably have ended in some morbid delusion; as it was, though often exaggerated, and tinged by the peculiarities of her character, there was to be found in it the spirit of simple submission and humility, and the ornament of that 'meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.'

And now it had its reward. Yet it seems to me that there is nothing more striking, I may even say startling, than the knowledge of the 'much tribulation' through which those who may truly be called the saints of God have been prepared for the enjoyment of His kingdom. If they, so pure-minded, humble, devoted, loving, required so much sorrow, what must be needed for us, who now in health and prosperity are giving half our heart to the service of Christ and half to the service of Mammon? As I watched Mrs Weir gradually, hourly, sinking into her grave, I felt as though the hard probation of centuries would never bring me to the same heavenly mind. That was a distrust of God's grace, but it was not easy to overcome it; and even the gentle tenderness and affection towards myself, shown in Mrs Weir's every look and tone, and repeated to me in words of love which can never be forgotten, made me only

feel the more my own coldness and the depth of my ingratitude towards God.

Mrs Weir asked for her husband almost the first moment that she was restored to consciousness. Miss Milicent and I had arranged beforehand what we should say, and we told her that he had left Paris on account of some business, and that we did not think he would be able to return just yet. She received the information very quietly, and, as I thought at the time, without suspicion; but the following day, when she rallied for a few hours, she called Miss Milicent to her bedside, and made her bring a pen and ink, and write a few lines from her dictation. They were very few, and I saw the large drops fall from Miss Milicent's eyes as she noted down the words; when they were ended, she brought the note to me, and laying it before me, said, 'It's no use to deceive her, Ursie. She has a quicker sight than we have.' I read,—

'DEAREST GEORGE,—

'Something tells me you are gone away in trouble. May God help you in it! I have never been any comfort to you. I ask your forgiveness for this, and all my other shortcomings, and I thank you that you have allowed me to be with you. Our daughter, Milicent, will do more than I have ever done to make you happy. I pray you to love and cherish her. Dearest George, though I am a grievous sinner, God, of His great mercy, has given me peace through Jesus Christ. I beseech Him to give it to you also. If it had been His will, I should have been glad to tell you myself, that I am now, and have ever been, your dutiful and affectionate wife, Margaret Weir. His will be done. There is a place in Heaven for all.'

After writing this note, Mrs Weir asked no questions. It seemed as though the earthly anxiety was not allowed to linger in her mind, and her heart was no doubt at rest, from the feeling that she had fulfilled her last duty to her husband. I was very thankful for this. If Mr Weir had been with us, his presence must have been distressingly uncongenial,—and Miss Milicent would have felt it to be so even more than Mrs Weir. All the good that was in her came out now,—and yet in a very painful and often strange way. Longing to nurse her mother, and do things which might make up for her neglect, she yet put me forward on every occasion, saying that she was not fit to wait upon

any one so good,—but I was determined that this state of feeling should not continue, and I urged, and at last induced her to sit with her mother, and read to her just the few verses from the Psalms, or the Gospel, which were all Mrs Weir could bear to hear. An English clergyman, who was most attentive and kind, came every day, and then Miss Milicent was obliged to speak, and take her proper place in the family ; but when we joined in the prayers, she kept aloof in a distant part of the room, kneeling by herself, and with such a look in her face when she rose up!—as if the self-reproach of a whole life had been weighing upon her. It was the third day after the fever had taken a turn that I said something to her about Mrs Temple, who had come back to Paris, and sent messages of inquiry. Somewhat of the old spirit appeared, and she said to me hastily, ‘There can’t be any message sent except that we don’t want to see her. I should run out of the house if she came in.’ An instant afterwards she corrected herself and added, ‘Yet she might have as much cause to turn away from me. Ursie Grant, I am a great sinner, and you must say some prayers for me.’

I did pray for her constantly and fervently, more so than she could possibly have imagined ; and now, seeing her thus moved, I ventured to say, ‘It might be right that Mrs Temple should come, if she wishes it.’

She stood silent ; then said, ‘Yes, send for her,’ and made no other remark.

I had no fear for the meeting now. Mrs Weir’s spirit was too near the hour of its eternal freedom to dread the presence of one connected with the remembrance of only earthly bondage. Yet I felt it right to prepare her, and I was sure that Miss Milicent would not undertake the duty. The greater part of the day was spent now in a torpor, which was nearly, though not quite, sleep. Late in the afternoon she was roused a little, and I went to her and said, ‘Dear ma’am, there has been a friend anxious to see you ever since you have been ill—Mrs Temple. She would think it kind if you would let her come.’

There was just a shadow of pain on Mrs Weir’s face ; then she said, ‘My niece is always good, Ursula, and I should like to thank her that she let me live with her. It is right of you to think of it.’ After this she did not close her eyes again, but seemed to be more alive to what was going on, and fearing she might at last be restless, I sent directly for Mrs Temple, and asked her not to delay. Yet I did not in reality expect her.

After the fear of infection, which she had expressed so strongly, I thought she would be far too much afraid. I suspect now, however, that the true cause of her keeping so aloof was not fear, but wounded pride. As she could not take the upper hand and have everything her own way, she chose to give up entirely, only remaining in the neighbourhood to watch what was being done; the dread of infection, I believe, was only an excuse. But the presence of death brings truth to us all, and Mrs Temple, I cannot but think, was in her heart too conscious of the unkindness which she had often been guilty of, not to wish to soothe her conscience by some last tokens of thought and affection for her aunt. She came almost before I thought the message could have reached her, and we went together into Mrs Weir's room. I felt kindly towards her then for the first time in my life. How could I do otherwise when I saw the heavenly smile on Mrs Weir's face, and heard her say, 'I gave you a great deal of trouble, Matilda; I should like you to say you forgive me?'

Mrs Temple was no monster, and genuine tears of grief, perhaps of repentance also, moistened her eyes. 'I may have seemed hard to you, dear aunt,' she said. 'I did for the best.'

'It was all quite right; quite right. I would not have one trial less. We are going the same road, Matilda. May our dear Saviour bring us both to a happy end.'

Mrs Temple kissed her, and then asked if she would like her to pray, and the next minute I found myself joining in an extempore prayer without any shrinking or coldness. But Mrs Temple's feeling was real; the mode of its expression might not suit my individual taste, but her prayer was sincere, the offering of a heart which for the moment, was simple and in earnest, and when we stand with a fellow-creature on the banks of the dark stream which flows between Time and Eternity, all differences are forgotten in the thought of the great change which 'cometh alike to all.'

When I rose up from my knees I felt as though I had never understood before the meaning of those words, 'And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity; these three; but the greatest of these is Charity.'

The next day we received the Holy Communion together. Mrs Weir kept up wonderfully well during the service. Mrs Temple went home afterwards. Miss Milicent was very tired, and lay down in her bed, and I sat with Mrs Weir. Still and peaceful, though so worn and wasted, her face had recovered

somewhat of the expression which I remembered when I first saw her at Dene; and oh, how my thoughts travelled back to the days which I had spent there, whilst visions of its brightness and beauty came to me like the remembrance of a happier and a noisier world amidst the din of the great city of earth's distractions! I think the same memories may have haunted Mrs Weir also, for, after remaining a long time silent, she raised her eyes to mine, and, as they sparkled with momentary brilliancy, said, 'You will go back to your home, Ursula; you will sometimes be at Dene again. I love no place on earth but that. When you see it, you will remember me.'

'How could I help it, dear ma'am?' I said; 'I am sure being with you there was the first thing that seemed to set me forth on the right road.'

'Heaven is perfect,' she continued, 'but earth is lovely and very pleasant. Do you remember how free the birds at Dene were—free and tame, and their songs so sweet in the wood under the hill? They seemed to come from far away over the sea to tell me of other lands; but I shall hear the voices of angels soon; and, Ursula, they will sing to me of heaven.'

The last sentence was scarcely audible. There had been a sudden spring of life for the instant, but it was flickering and fading fast. I watched her anxiously as she leaned her head back on the pillow. Her countenance changed a little, yet it was not like death. As I bent over her, listening to her breathing, I caught some indistinct words; they told me where her thoughts were resting,—on the one great Atoning Love which alone could be her help. Miss Milicent soon afterwards came in. She was more startled than I was, for she saw a greater alteration. The contrast between the stern anguish that convulsed her face, and the peaceful, though wasted, beauty of her mother's, I shall never forget. I held Mrs Weir's hand in mine. We stood by the bedside, watching for about twenty minutes. Then came the look which I knew too well.

'Ursula,' I heard Mrs Weir whisper, and she tried to turn her head, 'is Milicent here?' The large rough hand was laid in hers. Mrs Weir's eyes followed me: 'both—blessings,' she said. 'God's love'—the prayer was unfinished, the breathing became scarcely audible; then it ceased, and Miss Milicent threw herself upon the bed with the bitter cry, 'O mother, mother!'

CHAPTER LXXIV.

I NEED not describe in detail what followed that hour of sorrow,—for sorrowful indeed it was,—most sad and desolate. Yet I could not think of myself when I saw Miss Milicent's grief. She sank under it completely. All the energy of her nature was turned into repentance, and she exaggerated her own neglects as much as she had hitherto excused them. Mrs Temple came every day and took all arrangements upon herself. I think she imagined I should wish to interfere, but my task was over; and I had now but one desire, to be permitted to stay till I had seen the remains of my dear and most honoured friend laid in their last resting-place. It was my hand which assisted in laying her in her coffin, and strewed over her a few late flowers, and mine was the last loving eye which gazed upon her sweet face before it was shut out from our sight for ever.

Dear lady! whether we think it or not, we all by our lives preach a sermon, either of warning or example. Hers could never be forgotten.

It was very hard for me to turn from the stillness of that death-chamber to plans for the business of life; still more hard to feel that the seas would soon roll between me and the last home of one of the best of friends. If Mrs Weir had died at Stonecliff, I might have tended her grave myself; and the occupation would have brought back to me her holy counsels and her simple faith, and urged me forward on the path to heaven. But it was not to be, and I could but pass beyond this temporary separation on earth, to the hope of an eternal reunion in a better world.

During the few days that followed her mother's death, Miss Milicent had kept closely to her room, refusing to admit any one. On the day of the funeral she appeared, looking very ill, but quite quiet and self-controlled. Mr Temple and she were the chief mourners. Mr Weir dared not appear. I felt how much more worldly show than sincerity there is in such public demonstrations. Mrs Weir's death was nothing to Mr Temple; to me it was a lifelong sorrow; yet I was obliged to keep in the background, and to remember that no one, not even Miss Milicent, could understand the depths of my grief. When we returned home, Miss Milicent called me into her room, and

seizing hold of me before I was aware what she was going to do, kissed me, and said, 'Ursie, thank you;' and then sitting down on her black trunk, gave way to a violent burst of grief. I let it have its course, and it ended as suddenly as it had begun. She dashed away her tears, and confronting me, said, abruptly, 'Ursie, I am going to live with Matilda Temple.'

I was startled. I had thought of what her future would be, and had supposed that, of course, she would join her father.

'Look,' she continued, and she drew a letter from her pocket, and her lip quivered, 'my father won't have me.'

She had expressed the fact broadly, but it was so in reality. As I had often suspected, Mr Weir was encumbered by his daughter's presence. He took advantage of his present untoward circumstances to inform her of it. The letter was like himself, not uncourteous, not unkind, but utterly selfish, whilst putting his determination entirely upon the ground of consideration for her. He said his movements were uncertain: he might be obliged to encounter many roughnesses which would not suit her; Mrs Weir's death would place Miss Milicent in possession of a comfortable income, which he had no doubt she would be willing so to manage as that he himself should have enough to subsist upon, without becoming a burden to his friends. This was, perhaps, reversing the common order of things, which required that the parent should support the child, but after the many misfortunes which he had met with in life, it was his only resource. He required very little, only sufficient to give him the ordinary comforts of life without care;—and then he named a sum which took away at least two-thirds of the small additional income which Miss Milicent would now inherit in addition to her own slender fortune. But she was too generous to think of this. If he had asked for it all, she would have given it cheerfully. What really distressed her was his wish to live alone. She was fond of him, and overlooked his many faults, and flattered herself that during the last year she had added materially to his happiness. To find that she had not only by her advice and encouragement assisted in bringing him into difficulties, but that she had failed to increase his comforts—and this was most clear from the tenor of his letter,—was a most bitter blow. Poor thing! I felt for her from the bottom of my heart, and the way in which she clung to me, as though I was the only person in the world who had the slightest affection for her, touched me inexpressibly.

The plan of living with Mrs Temple, most distasteful though it unquestionably was, seemed certainly the best that could be arranged for the present. I think Miss Milicent found some satisfaction in the very fact of its being painful. She was in that unhappy, self-reproachful state of mind, in which we naturally long to do penance, for our own comfort, without the slightest thought of being able to make reparation or atonement.

‘I shall feel what my mother felt, Ursie,’ she said, ‘I had rather; if it were to be scourged I should be glad. Write to me sometimes; don’t forget me; I could not bear that. If Matilda Temple is unbearable, I must let it out to you, only my mother did not do it; she kept it all in and never complained. O Ursie, Ursie! why was not I born a saint like her?’

‘You may be one, you know, Miss Milicent,’ I said, ‘if you only go the same way to work, and you will have enough to exercise your patience and forbearance.’

‘Enough! yes, enough to try ten thousand saints; but I will put up with it, Ursie. I mean to bear it, and one ought, you know, after making friends as we have lately. But she will worry me out of my life. She means to travel,—I like travelling, I don’t like anything else; but I can’t endure being worried.’

This travelling notion was a new one, and I thought it sounded well. Miss Milicent explained that Mrs Temple wished to remain on the continent for a year or two. It was a plan of economy. ‘And perhaps we may meet with my father somewhere; perhaps he may join us,—that would be a comfort, Ursie,’ said Miss Milicent, catching hold of the least vestige which remained of her former life.

I did not throw doubts on her hopes, rather encouraged her to look at the plan in the most cheerful light. I knew she would have quite sufficient wretchedness to undergo when I was gone, and she had no one to whom to open her heart, to require all the support which a sanguine nature could give. But my mind was certainly relieved by the present plan, and I ventured to look further into futurity, and to suggest to Miss Milicent that if, after her return to England, she had a fancy to live by herself, she might take a cottage at Compton, renew her duties in the parish, and allow me occasionally to see her, and talk over old times and happier days. I think this prospect soothed her more than anything else. She shook my hand with both hers, and told me

that she had always felt I had been sent to be a blessing to them, and she wished she had followed my advice before; there was no person in all the world she depended upon so thoroughly.

'I was not much comfort to any one in the old days, when you first knew me, Miss Milicent,' I said. 'Do you remember your lesson about the darned stocking? I behaved worse than you knew then.'

'Ah! Ursie, you went my way, you were wilful; but you turned back soon. It was at Dene, I recollect; those were pleasant days; there is no place like Dene!'

'None,' I repeated, earnestly.

'So my mother thought,' she continued; 'well! some day I may go back and see it—only it may be all changed.'

'We needn't look forward,' I said; 'often places remain unchanged for very long.'

'Some do, some don't; I can't think Dene will. It will come to ruin, and be forgotten like us;' she paused. 'There! Ursie, that's for you;' and pushing into my hand a beautiful mourning ring, containing some of her mother's hair, Miss Milicent opened the door, motioned me from the room, and the interview ended. Many persons would have thought her not only strange, but cold; others might have said she had no religious feeling, no earnestness; but I knew her better. There was sincerity of purpose underneath all this roughness; a struggle with her own self-will; a humbling consciousness that she had done wrong; a willingness to accept whatever might be in store for her in the dispensation of God's Providence. It was as much as I expected. As Miss Milicent herself expressed it, she certainly was not born a saint, and it was hard to expect her to become one all at once.

Mrs Temple was civil to me all this time. I believe that which weighed with her in my favour more than any other circumstance, was the fact that Mrs Weir had not put by any money for me, or left me any remembrance except a copy of Bishop Jeremy Taylor's Sermons. Her fortune was entailed upon Miss Milicent, and with regard to any personal property, her will had been drawn up several years before, and latterly she had been far too nervous and ill to make any change in it. I don't remember that a thought of what might be left me had ever crossed my mind, but certainly I was very much relieved that things were as they were, when I found that one of Mrs Temple's constant fears was, that I should in some way, I really don't

know how, induce her aunt to favour me to the disadvantage of her relations.

After Mrs Weir's will was read, her manner visibly changed ; and I was not in a mood to bear malice, and was willing to accept the alteration, and be thankful for it. I was, however, only a useless burden to the family now, and in spite of Miss Milicent's entreaties that I would stay just for the few remaining days they were in Paris, I made my preparations for leaving without delay. Mr Temple procured my passport ; Mrs Temple, though she made no apology for her accusations, paid me the money that was due, and said that she believed I had tried to do my duty ; Louise gave me innumerable instructions about the Custom-house, and Miss Milicent accompanied me to the railway station.

The French practice, of not allowing any person to go upon the platform except those who intend to travel, was a real trial to us both. We lingered together as long as we possibly could, saying very little, but each, I am sure, feeling that every moment was crowded with dear and hallowed remembrances ; till at last, looking at her watch, Miss Milicent drew me to the door which led to the waiting-room, once more kissed me, muttered a hasty ' Now, Ursie, go—God bless you : '—and we parted.

As I placed myself in the railway carriage, I felt that Paris would from thenceforth be a dream ; that my real life lay at Sandcombe.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE journey was long and uncomfortable. It is surprising to me now how I managed it as I did ; but I had received full instructions, and having no one to think of but myself, I was free from nervousness. That is a great help always. I suppose we scarcely know how heavy is the burden of responsibility for others, even when all seems to go well, until it is for a time removed. It was perfect rest, in spite of the bodily discomfort, to lie still in my berth, as we crossed from Havre to Southampton, feeling that I was not answerable for the well-being of any single individual on board the vessel ; not till I had again landed on English ground, and felt myself drawing near home, did the

cares of life begin again to press upon me. In the interval I had gained strength for whatever was to come. Roger was to meet me in Hove. I had written to make the appointment, not at the station, but in the town, where he had business ; and as the omnibus, which took me from the railway station, stopped at the court-yard of the Red Lion, I saw the Sandcombe chaise just ready to be brought out. A few moments afterwards, Roger himself appeared at some little distance down the street. I forgot all proprieties, and ran forward to meet him.

‘Well! my little Trot! there are some things blessings in life;’ and Roger drew my arm within his, hurried me on, and as soon as we were safe within the shelter of the inn yard, gave me such a greeting as I certainly had not received since I left England.

I looked up at him then anxiously, but he did not seem in any way altered, his face had just the same honest brightness in it, and as I kept my eyes fixed upon him, and said, ‘I had been away such a long, long time,’ he laughed, and asked me if I thought his hair would have turned gray in three months. I don’t know what I thought, but it was certainly a relief to see him apparently so unchanged. I asked after Jessie; he answered me rather shortly, but not as if he was troubled about her. ‘She was very tolerably well,’ he said; ‘she had been doing a little too much lately; but now that I was returned all would be right,’ and then he hurried me into the chaise, observing that we should be late home, and the nights were cold and dark. All the way to Sandcombe we talked incessantly about everything, and everybody. I said the most, but that was natural, there was so much to tell, and Roger kept on asking me all kinds of questions. I felt it would be unkind to trouble him with my grief for Mrs Weir; he would have sympathised with it, but it would have marred the happiness of our meeting; and besides, the feeling was becoming sacred, it could not be approached except at certain times, and under certain circumstances, so I dwelt principally upon things which I thought would amuse him. He had never been in France, and was interested in my descriptions of the people and the places I had visited, though in truth I had seen very little, and certainly not enough to enable me to form an opinion. ‘I won’t tell you what I think about the country myself,’ I said, in answer to his inquiry, ‘for I don’t seem to know it. Some things there are in it which I like very much, and others very little, and I suppose

that is the case with most other countries that are different from one's own. Louise has an English friend, a lady's-maid, who declares that it "is inside out, and upside down, and all wrong;" but that is because she was so scandalised at the way they spend their Sundays.'

Roger laughed. 'Well,' he said, 'I don't think France would suit me in that way, and, by the by, Ursie, you remind me that we are getting out of some of our good ways at Sandcombe. Jessie has been too tired, since you have been away, to hear Esther Smithson read, and I have a fear that she is not quite so steady as she was.'

'She might be made to read to herself, if Jessie is not able to hear her,' I said, 'but it takes only a short time.'

'Yes,' and he became thoughtful. 'Two pair of hands are better than one, Ursie. They will feel that at Longside when Mary is gone.'

'When is she to be married?' I asked. 'She has treated me shamefully, and not written to me once.'

'A letter is a trouble to her, I suppose, as it is to me. I believe the wedding is to come off early in April. Somehow, Trot, I can't help thinking that John Hervey and she have made rather a mess of it. John has altered since this affair has been settled. He came back from France with all his spirits gone, and looking quite ill.'

'Indeed!' I answered; I did not trust myself to say more, though I was terribly conscience-stricken.

'John says so little about himself at any time,' said Roger, 'it is not easy to get at what he thinks, in spite of his open ways. It strikes me sometimes, Trot, that there is nothing more deceiving in this world than that sort of manner which makes you think you know persons thoroughly at first sight.'

Roger spoke as if he was a little aggrieved, and I taxed him with it.

'No!' he said, 'I have nothing to find fault with, except, perhaps, that John does not come over to Sandcombe as he used to do, and is always busy. Change must come, I suppose, in all ways,' and he sighed. 'I remember the time when John Hervey wouldn't have kept back a thought from me.'

'Perhaps he finds that you keep back some from him,' I said. 'A married man is different from a single one, Roger.'

He became quite silent, and continued so for a long time. I thought it a bad sign, and fell into a train of thought in conse-

quence. When we spoke again, it was only to complain of the roughness of the lane leading off the down, for we were fast drawing near to Sandcombe.

'Is that Jessie?' I exclaimed, as I saw in the dusk a figure standing in the entrance passage.

Not Jessie,—it was Esther Smithson. Jessie was waiting for me in the parlour. I hurried in; Roger followed me closely.

'I have brought her home, you see,' he said. 'She was punctual to her time to a minute.'

'Not like me,' said Jessie, approaching to assist me in unfastening my cloak. Her tone was a little sharp.

'I don't know that I said so,' was Roger's quick reply. 'Sit down by the fire, Trot, and warm yourself. Jessie, what have you got for her for tea? She must be starving, for we had not time to have anything in Hove.'

'There is some cold meat, I believe,' said Jessie.

'It ought to be hot,' replied Roger. 'Isn't there some broth in the house? You would like a basin of broth, Ursie?'

'Yes; I really think I should very much,' I said. 'I have learned to like potage, as the French call it, from never having had a dinner without it for the last two months.'

'We are not up to French soups, I am afraid,' said Jessie, slowly moving to the door. 'I don't know whether there is any broth; but I will go and see.'

'I'll go,' said Roger, hurrying after her. 'You sit still, Jessie, and hear all that Ursie has to tell. And where is William? He will be wishing to see her.'

'William was here just now,' said Jessie. 'But, Ursie, dear, had not you better go up-stairs and take off your things, and make yourself comfortable, and then come down and talk afterwards?' It was the wisest plan certainly, and I followed the suggestion. Jessie lingered over the fire, and Roger called out, 'I will take her boxes up-stairs. Just see, Jessie, that tea is got ready, will you?' And seizing the smallest box, he carried it up before me, and uncorded it.

'Jessie isn't strong,' he said, in a tone of apology, 'and we are obliged to be careful of her. She will be quite a different person now you are come back, Ursie.'

'I can scarcely judge how she looks,' I said, 'having only seen her by fire-light. You are not anxious about her?'

'No; not exactly.' And there was the same sudden silence

as before, when Jessie's name was mentioned. Yet Roger did not seem at all inclined to leave me. His way of lingering made me think of Jessie's arrival after her marriage, and I don't know what kind of feeling came over me, as he sat down on my trunk, looking at me whilst I took off my bonnet, and not offering to go till I said to him, laughingly, that I should think he had been to France himself, and learned to make a parlour of a bedroom. It was scarcely pleasure, though yet it was very pleasant, to find him so glad to have me at home again. It was more a sense of unfitness, as if I was receiving an affection which was not my due.

The tea-table was certainly the most comfortable sight I had seen since I went away; and William's welcome was nearly as hearty as Roger's. 'Home is home, be it never so homely,' says the proverb; and my heart bounded with thankfulness, as I thought of the many blessings to which I had been permitted to return. By candle-light I was able to examine more closely the countenances in which I was so deeply interested. William was looking remarkably well; but his eyes, he told me, were as bad as ever. He was beginning to employ himself in knitting; there were so many hours when he was forced to be within doors, and Jessie was not able to read aloud much. Roger—I was not satisfied about him. The happy look which had cheered me when we first met was gone now. He had his old grave face,—the face belonging to the latter days of our life at Dene, when he was projecting his expedition to Canada. I could gather but little from it, however. Roger's uniform sobriety of manner was as repelling to curiosity as other persons' perpetual brightness. Jessie I not only looked at, but watched most carefully. She was a greater problem than Roger. She looked thin, and ill, and restless, and unhappy; but the unhappiness I knew was not necessarily mental; for whenever her finger ached she was miserable. It was her manner to Roger, and his to her, which I felt I must study, if I wished to discover how things really stood between them; and here, again, there was much to perplex me. Roger was very attentive, extremely thoughtful about her; no one could have been more so; but it was a thoughtfulness which rather distressed me; it seemed as though there was too much duty in it. And Jessie was grateful, but absent in manner, and a little inclined to take offence, as she seemed to expect him to find fault with her.

They were the meekest trifles which gave me these impressions;

no one but myself probably would have noticed them ; and we had a pleasant, cheerful evening, and stayed up talking much later than usual ; and when at last I went to my room, I was too tired to be kept awake even by anxiety.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

I HAD made up my mind that I would have an explanation with Jessie, directly I found myself at home. Three weeks went by, Christmas came and passed, and the New Year opened upon us, and still there was a mysterious silence between us. I hope it was not my fault ; I can scarcely accuse myself, strictly speaking, of want of moral courage ; but Jessie had the most singular and ingenious way of avoiding the dreaded subject ; and twice, when we drew so near that my next question would certainly have been an entreaty that she would open her mind to me, she became so painfully agitated, that I actually dreaded to make the experiment again. And all this time there was nothing exactly to remark upon in her way of going on, but only a half-hidden and unceasing restlessness, which made every occupation a burden, and every conversation wearisome, and which often compelled Roger to turn to me for the assistance and sympathy which it seemed in vain to expect from her.

It was the beginning of January, a Saturday ; Roger was gone to Hove, and we did not expect him home till late. We had our tea, and prepared a little hot supper for him, for he was likely to come in cold and hungry. There had been somewhat of a press in the money-market for some weeks ; every one was feeling it, and Roger, with all his prudence, could not hope to escape better than his neighbours. The farmers generally were grumbling, but Roger never grumbled, he only looked a little thoughtful, and begged me to keep an eye upon the house expenses. We were all listening particularly for Roger, on account of this uneasiness in our minds, though any misgiving we had was more for others than ourselves ; and all at the same moment caught the sound of his horse's hoofs coming down the lane. I rather made way for Jessie, thinking she would hurry out to meet him ; but finding she did not, I went out myself.

‘Well! what news?’ I said, as I helped him off with his greatcoat.

‘Not so good as it might be, but nothing to affect us. I am later home than you expected, I suppose.’

I was always painfully quick in understanding Roger’s tone. He did not wish to dwell upon the subject, and I left it to William to ask disagreeable questions. Jessie and I laid out the supper, and gave him some hot beer, for he was bitterly cold, and stood in front of the fire saying nothing, very much as though his words were frozen also.

‘Eat your supper,’ said William, good-naturedly; ‘and then tell us your news. We are all willing to wait.’

‘I have no money news that concerns us,’ answered Roger. ‘Every one is complaining and talking, and saying a great deal which had better not be said. Jessie, my dear, if you are tired, you had much better go to bed.’

‘But I should like to wait and hear what you have to tell,’ said Jessie.

‘Nothing, my dear, nothing,’ said Roger, ‘except that there has been a run upon a London bank, which you won’t understand anything about.’

‘I know that people are very often ruined by such things,’ said Jessie.

‘We are not ruined, my dear, nor any of our friends; so you need not distress yourself about it; but go,’ and he lighted a candle for her.

I think she felt as though she was treated like a child, and I felt the same, and was a little inclined to blame Roger for carrying on the old system of making her a plaything. But no one would have thought this night that there was any idea of play in his mind; and as soon as Jessie was out of the room both William and I exclaimed, ‘There is something, Roger; for pity’s sake, let us have it out.’

‘If the world could have its tongue stopped!’ he said, quietly helping himself to a mutton chop, very much as though he had no appetite for it. ‘That scamp, Mr Macdonald, and John Hervey have had a quarrel.’

‘A quarrel,’ I exclaimed,—‘what about?’—and my heart beat very fast as a host of absurd fears and fancies crowded into my mind.

‘It is almost more than I can tell,—what about,’—replied Roger. ‘I didn’t hear the beginning. They were in the

coffee-room at the Red Lion,—your name was brought in, Ursie.’

I started from my seat. ‘Mine! my name brought in by Mr Macdonald.’

‘Don’t be frightened, Trot,’ said Roger, speaking with forced quietness, ‘the man’s a rogue, and every one knows it, and the utmost he could say against you was that you had kept poor Mrs Weir from falling into his clutches; and for this I thought John Hervey would have knocked him down.’

‘He needn’t have troubled himself to do that,’ I said; ‘Mr Macdonald is beneath the notice of any right-minded person.’

‘Quite,’ said Roger; ‘but he was insolent, and half-tipsy, and there was no knowing how to deal with him.’

Roger’s manner was strange still. I did not feel as though he had told us all.

‘I wish it hadn’t happened on a Saturday, and at the Red Lion,’ said William; ‘reports get about so oddly. But tell us all about it. I don’t understand.’

‘I shall only vex Trot,’ said Roger, kindly; ‘and the thing is past now.’

‘I would rather hear,’ was my reply; ‘I may have to defend my own cause, so I may as well know what accusations are brought against me.’

Still Roger hesitated. ‘I think I had better leave it to John Hervey,’ he said; ‘I begged him to come over on Monday and explain, and he promised he would. He took your part gallantly, Trot.’

‘He would be sure to do that,’ said William. ‘If it wasn’t that we have all been thinking him in love with Mary Kemp up to within the last month or two, I should have said that he had a considerable fancy for Ursie.’

This was more than I could endure, and the idea of a long private explanation with John Hervey upon matters so nearly concerning myself, actually made me tremble.

‘I don’t choose to wait till Monday,’ I said; ‘I wish to hear all there is to tell to-night. I shall not sleep the worse for it, Roger, for I have nothing on my conscience.’

‘Nothing,’ he said, patting my shoulder affectionately. ‘I’ll answer for that, and so will any one who has known my little Trot as long as I have. But at the best you will only get a rigmorole story from me, Ursie. I went into the coffee-room, and found John Hervey and Mr Macdonald at high words. As far

as I could gather, the conversation had begun about banks and speculations, and Macdonald boasted, so I was told, of some of his, not rightly knowing, as you may believe, what he said; and John Hervey took him to task, being aware that they were not much better than frauds. I told him afterwards that he would have done better to let the man alone; but he said, he felt it right to speak out, because of some present who were listening, and might have gone away with a false impression. Well! Macdonald got angry, and was impertinent, and accused John in return. I heard that myself. He was not enough in his senses to make what he said quite plain, but the upshot of it was that you, Ursie, and John Hervey had been in league to defraud poor Mrs Weir, and had actually got a large sum of money from her.'

I laughed; the idea was too absurd to make me angry.

'It wouldn't signify if there had been no one by to hear,' said William; 'but I suppose the room was full.'

'There were two or three men there, most of them Macdonald's friends, and they backed him up.'

'And what did you do?' I said; 'you couldn't stand by quietly and hear such atrocious falsehoods uttered about your sister?'

'You had a champion in John who needed no support,' said Roger; 'but you needn't fear, Trot, but that I gave all the help in words I could—till'—he hesitated—

'Till what?' I asked. 'Speak out, Roger, I am able to stand up against anything Mr Macdonald may say.'

'Till'—and Roger's voice grew quite hoarse and hollow—'till he declared that my wife had told him everything, and that he could produce letters from her in proof; and then I gave him the lie direct, and turned him out of the room.'

I was silent. William exclaimed, 'Bravo!'

Roger rose from the table, took out a memorandum book, and began to make some notes in it. There was an awkward silence, and I asked if he had finished his supper.

'Yes, quite.'

I cleared the table, and the servants were called in to prayers.

Roger read as calmly as usual; there was no indication in his voice of any trouble in his mind, but when I looked at his face as we rose from our knees, I felt I dared not ask him any more questions, and I bade him good night. My kiss must have told him what I could not express in words.

I heard him come up-stairs very soon after me. I was not surprised at that, for William was not likely to perceive that certain subjects could not be approached, and Roger would be thankful to escape from him. Jessie's room joined mine; I often wished that it did not, for I could not help sometimes hearing the tone in which she and Roger conversed, though no words were intelligible. I tried not to listen this evening, but the very effort seemed only to increase my natural quickness of hearing. First came a few light observations, then something like an anxious inquiry from Jessie, and grave words in answer. Questions and replies followed quickly, and at last a longer speech from Roger, in a voice which struck me as though he were trying to keep his feelings under control. A quick, faint answer from Jessie succeeded, and a burst of hysterics.

The next minute Roger knocked at the door of my chamber. 'Ursie! Trot! can you let me in?' and I admitted him. He looked very much distressed and frightened.

'Have you any sal volatile? Can you go to Jessie? Poor little darling! I ought to have prepared her better, but she would know. That good-for-nothing wretch! but I won't think of him. Go to her, Ursie; you can manage her.' He followed me into Jessie's room; I forced her to take the medicine, and spoke to her rather decidedly upon the necessity of controlling herself, and for a moment she was calm. But when Roger addressed her in his gentle, tender way, the excitement returned again. 'Just leave her to me,' I said at last, 'we shall do nothing while you are here. Go down-stairs, and when she is better again, I will call you;' and after some hesitation, and many words of fondness, he consented, and Jessie and I were left alone.

As I had expected, she recovered herself then, at least to a certain degree, but this was no common attack of hysterics. I could insist upon her being quiet, and she was so, but when she sat quite still, the expression of her face showed the most intense mental suffering. After seeing her comfortably in bed I was going to tell Roger that she was better, when she grasped my hand, and said in a faint voice, 'Ursie, you know.'

'Yes,' I said, gravely, 'indeed I know; but it may be better not to talk to-night.'

'Stay, stay,' she exclaimed, fancying I was going to leave her. 'I have told him. Ursie, he knows that the only letter that could have been meant was to Mrs Price.'

‘Was it really?’ It might have been hard in me, but there was doubt in my tone. Yet she was not indignant.

‘Yes, indeed, indeed; O Ursie! I am very miserable.’

‘Why?’ I asked; and still there was a lingering suspicion in my mind. ‘Is Roger so angry at your having written foolishly to Mrs Price?’

‘Oh! no, no; he has forgiven; he does not think—Ursie, it really was to Mrs Price.’

‘You have told me so before, dear Jessie,’ I replied. ‘I confess I am relieved, for Mrs Temple herself showed me when I was in Paris a portion of the letter which I suppose was alluded to, and certainly gave me to understand, though I did not believe her then, that it had been written by you to Mr Macdonald.’

‘It was a letter I wrote to Mrs Price once when she was in London,’ said Jessie. ‘It was very foolish of me to say what I did, but she was always asking about you; and I did not mean any harm, Ursie, indeed I didn’t.’

‘It was foolish,’ I said, ‘but not, of course, the same as it would have been if you had written about our private affairs to Mr Macdonald. Jessie, dear, if you have told all, go to sleep now, and to-morrow talk the matter over quietly with Roger. Don’t be afraid.’

‘Wouldn’t you be afraid?’ she said. ‘Wouldn’t you really care?’

‘Not if it was merely a thoughtless letter to Mrs Price.’

‘But if—Ursie, I did not speak at once, when Roger asked me to assure him that it was all false,—and his look—oh! it was so terrible.’

‘Terrible, without cause, then,’ I said. ‘Jessie, you wrong Roger by being so afraid of him.’

‘You would be afraid if you were like me; but you are his sister, not his wife.’

‘And, as a wife’s love is greater than a sister’s,’ I said, ‘so should her confidence be greater also. Jessie, dear, you have had something upon your mind for months,—you have acknowledged this to me; I don’t ask what it is, but I entreat you to take advantage of the present opening, and confess everything to Roger.’

She turned her face away from me, and I heard her murmur, ‘I could have told you.’

‘Then let me hear,’ I said; ‘but remember, Jessie, that

Roger must know at last, and who is to tell him so well as yourself?’

‘I didn’t mean—I didn’t think about it. O Ursie! they have used me cruelly.’

‘I suppose you mean Mrs Price and Mr Macdonald,’ I said. ‘I could not be surprised at anything they did.’

‘So unkind!’ persisted Jessie, ‘to turn my words against me, and bring you into difficulty; I never thought they would have done so.’

She was wandering from the important point, and I recalled her. ‘Don’t trouble yourself about anything that concerns me, dear Jessie,’ I replied. ‘Nothing which Mr Macdonald can say will affect me, for my conscience is free, at least on all points in which he can have any concern.’

‘Free!’ murmured Jessie. ‘Oh! how happy.’

‘And you may be happy too, dearest Jessie,’ I said, ‘if’——
She interrupted me.

‘Happy! Oh! never, never. Ursie, you don’t know. He can’t forgive.’

‘He can and will forgive everything,’ I replied. ‘He must do so,’ I added, rather weakening my own words, for I felt as though there might be some things,—deceit amongst them,—which it would be almost impossible for a husband to forgive, at least, in such a sense as to feel the same trust as before.

She took up the expression.

‘He must! but if he shouldn’t, Ursie, it would break my heart.’

Just then Roger knocked at the door rather impatiently. Jessie trembled all over.

‘Take courage,’ I whispered; ‘pray that you may be helped. Dearest Jessie, it can but be worse by delay.’

‘I can’t, Ursie; stay with me; don’t leave me.’

Another knock. I forcibly withdrew my hand, kissed her tenderly, and, with a prayer that God would aid her, turned away.

The voices in the room adjoining mine were again heard; the tone of the conversation was lower than before; at times it seemed to cease, and then it began again. I could gain nothing from it. I lingered and waited,—cold, and tired, and uneasy,—expecting I scarcely knew what, and at last went to bed.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

I DREADED the next morning more than I can tell. All the time I was dressing I was trying to guess what trouble might be in store for me, but Roger's face, when we met at breakfast, was a cordial to my heart. He was always very happy on a Sunday. He had a knack, which I could never attain, of putting aside anything which troubled him, and never allowed himself to be distressed with earthly cares on the one day of heavenly rest; and to my great astonishment, his cheerfulness on this morning was particularly marked, and his first words were—

‘Jessie has slept well; she is rather tired though, and not going to get up to breakfast;’ and then he added, ‘she is a forgiving little woman, she won't let me give that fellow, Macdonald, the dressing he deserves. But I must make him eat his own words, for her sake, though really no one, except his worthless companions, would believe anything he said.’

‘I suppose I may go to her after breakfast,’ I observed.

‘Yes, if she is awake; but I promised not to let her be disturbed, as she was still drowsy. She won't be able to go to church to-day, and I think I shall stay and read to her now, and go myself in the afternoon.’

I can't say how strange it was to me that he could take what had happened thus quietly. I fancied him so sensitive that the least imputation on his wife would have driven him nearly wild. It was evident that something had occurred to make such thoughts secondary. He insisted upon carrying up Jessie's breakfast himself, and stayed with her for some time. When he came down he said she complained of a little headache, and he thought it was better perhaps to let her be quiet, and for me not to go to her. William went out before church, and I had several things to attend to. Roger took up a book in the parlour, but I soon saw him saunter into the garden, and pace up and down the middle walk in the sunshine. When I was ready for church I joined him there.

‘It is a blessed day, is it not, Trot?’ he said, putting his hand fondly on my shoulder. ‘Doesn't it often strike you how quiet everything is on a Sunday in the country, as if the very birds and insects knew that it was a time of peace?’

We stood still and listened. Very far off there was a soft,

soothing murmur, the splash of the waves as they reached the shore, but no other sound broke the stillness.

'I could not bear to be without that one sound,' he said. 'It is like the breathing of a human being, a sign of life which can scarcely be called sound. And it does not disturb one. God is very gracious,' he added, looking up reverently to the sky, 'to give one hours like these after days of storm. Yesterday was a tempest to me, Trot, but it is all past now, as though it had never been.'

'Except,' I said, 'that you must have an explanation with Mr Macdonald.'

'Yes, I know; but don't talk about him. I shall soon make him retract. And, Ursie, he can't trouble me,—nothing can, whilst my darling'— He stopped.

'Go on,' I said, and I laughed kindly. 'Don't be ashamed to show that you are as weak as other men.'

'Well, I suppose it is weakness,' he said, like myself, laughing a little. 'But life would be worth little without it. And, Ursie, when people are first married, there is a good deal to learn.'

'They are making discoveries in unknown lands,' I replied; 'at least, so John Hervey says.'

'Does he? Well, he is right. I hope before long he may have the opportunity of travelling on his own account. At least, if he is sure of coming to the same result as myself.'

'Dearest Roger,' I said, 'no one can be so thankful as I am that you are happy.'

He was silent at first, but after a few moments of consideration, said, 'You must not misunderstand me, Ursie. Neither John Hervey nor any one else can expect to find perfection,—only love,' he added, and his tone sank as though he shrank from saying so much even to me.

'Jessie does love you devotedly,' I said; 'no one can doubt that.'

'No one, no one,' he said, hastily. 'But, Ursie, you women are problems, and often make us unjust.'

'Because we are inconsistent,' I said.

'You show the worst part of yourselves in everyday life. There seems to be a mist of petty weaknesses over you, and then comes disappointment in consequence, till a storm arises,—then you shine out like the sun.'

'I dare say you are right,' I said. 'And so one ought to be thankful for the storm?'

‘Most thankful!’ he replied. ‘I could say it to no one but you, Ursie; I never knew how Jessie loved me till last night.’

I don’t think I was ever more perplexed in my life as to what I should answer. The whole conversation was so entirely different from anything I had anticipated. My silence appeared like want of sympathy, but I could not speak. William’s appearance at the further end of the walk was an immense relief, and hastening towards him, I made him take my arm. Whether Roger noticed anything uncomfortable in my manner, I can’t say. I believe he was too much at peace that morning with God, the world, and himself, to be disturbed by any one. Even Mr Macdonald was put aside for a future day of reckoning.

William and I went to church together. I told Roger that possibly I might not return till after the afternoon service, for Mrs Richardson had made a proposal to me to take a class at the afternoon Sunday-school, and I was anxious if possible to oblige her. With Jessie to share my duties at home, I thought it might be managed. In case I did this, Mrs Richardson had kindly said she would give me luncheon at the Parsonage. It was not certain that I should be wanted till the next Sunday, but it was as well to be prepared. All the way to church I was obliged to talk to William, and he would bring forward the disagreeable subject of Mr Macdonald. Roger, he said, bore the matter too quietly; the man was a rascal, and deserved to be prosecuted for a libel. ‘Roger takes to heart what was said about Jessie, much more than what concerns you though, Ursie,’ added William, ‘and that aggravates me, I confess; for, after all, Jessie might have been a little foolish and gossiping, but nothing worse could be brought against her. It was not like accusing you of fraud.’

‘That notion is so simply absurd,’ I said, ‘that I really don’t trouble myself about it.’

‘I can’t help wishing that John Hervey had not made such a disturbance,’ persisted William. ‘It spreads the thing; I always thought him rather hot-headed. The only excuse is, as I said last night, Ursie, that he certainly has a half-liking for you; why shouldn’t you make up to each other?’ he added, turning round upon me sharply.

I replied, ‘Merely, I suppose, because it does not suit us.’

‘Not suit you! But why shouldn’t it? He has a comfortable income of his own, and is getting on in his business. And if

there come some little Rogers and Jessies, Sandcombe won't be large enough to hold us all.'

Very like William that was! Putting things just in the way most likely to fret me; and yet not imagining himself—or indeed, meaning to be otherwise than very good-natured. I took the first opportunity of changing the conversation, and soon afterwards we reached the church. There are times when past days come back to one, seemingly without cause; and the sight of the school children under the gallery brought to me the recollection of Miss Milicent, and the first time I saw her in Compton church, dressed in the cloth jacket and red handkerchief, and trying to awe us all into order. I felt that I should very much like to see her again, for my heart clung tenderly to the days associated with the remembrance of her; and the loss of Mrs Weir left still a blank at my heart, which nothing could fill. Country churches remain for years unaltered, and Compton church was precisely the same now as it was in those old days, except that a new generation of little figures might be seen on the wooden benches. I was glad to think that I should have to teach them; it gave me a fresh interest, and when Mrs Richardson came up to me after the service, and said she should be much obliged if I could stay, I was very willing to accede. William, I knew, would find his way home with the farm people; but just as he was setting forth, I saw John Hervey join him, and they entered into conversation. I was turning away to follow Mrs Richardson, and feeling thankful to have an excuse for escaping from John, when William called to me. 'Ursie, where are you marching to? Have you no thanks to give your champion?'

John's colour came up into his face, in a manner which was perfectly distressing. Indeed, I am not sure, whether to see a man blush is not worse than to see him shed tears. He put out his hand, drew it back, and stammered, and at last burst into a fit of laughter—really, I believe, because he did not know what else to do; for certain I am there was no mirth in his merriment.

I was very conscious,—which is a most uncomfortable feeling at all times,—and in my wish to be quite at ease, I said something which I am very nearly sure was nonsense. At any rate it made William interpose with, 'Well! if you two are not the strangest beings, one would think you had never met before. Ursie, surely you can say "Thank you," to a man who took your part as John Hervey did last night.'

'I don't think Mr Hervey needs words,' I said; 'he must know how grateful I am; only it is not a very pleasant subject to enter upon.'

'Indeed it is not!' exclaimed John. 'I wouldn't have a word said, except—I am afraid, Ursie, I must ask to have a few minutes' conversation with you.'

'We will wait till to-morrow,' I said; feeling myself at the same time to be the most cold, ungrateful creature living.

There was a tone of mournful bitterness in John's voice, as he said, 'I am quite aware that I am urging you against your will, but to-morrow it will be too late.'

'I must leave you to settle matters your own way,' said William, 'or I shall not be in time for dinner. Ursie, I shall send Roger to church in the afternoon, and he can walk home with you.'

I was left standing in the road with John Hervey, the villagers watching us. Six months ago I should no more have cared for this than I should for being seen holding a conversation with William or Roger; but now it made me uncomfortable, and in order to escape it, I said, 'We cannot stay here. Perhaps you would not mind coming down to the Parsonage with me. Mrs Richardson would let us have our conversation there, I am sure.'

'Just as you wish,' he said, quietly, and we walked on together.

Mrs Richardson was a very simple-minded person, who never suspected any one of a double meaning, and when I went to her and told her that Mr Hervey and I had a few words to say to each other, and that I did not like standing about in the road, she offered us at once to go into the school-room, whilst her children were having their dinner in the dining-room. 'And something shall be kept hot for you, Ursula,' she added, kindly, 'though don't be long, or you will have no time to eat it.' So John Hervey and I were once more doomed to a private interview, though happily we had a definite subject to talk about, which I felt to be a safeguard as long as we could keep to facts.

John began the conversation with another excuse for having forced it upon me, but I cut him short.

'There is no occasion to say anything of that kind,' I observed; 'you have been very good to me, Mr Hervey, in taking up my cause, and I am only sorry that you should have been called

upon to do it. But to say that I care much for what a man like Mr Macdonald may choose to assert when he is tipsy, would be untrue, and I should be glad to be certain that you felt as indifferent about it as I do.'

'It is not for you to care, Ursie, nor for me,' he replied. 'If one troubled one's self about false reports, life might be miserable. I thoroughly frightened Macdonald last night, and I have good reason to believe that he will never venture to repeat his falsehoods. If he does, I have the means of punishing him in my own hands. But he said something about your sister-in-law which unfortunately is true. She did write to him when you were away. It was from her that he learned what your movements were likely to be, and by that means they were communicated to M. Dalange.'

'Begging your pardon,' I said, 'I think you are under a mistake. Jessie wrote one note to Mrs Price, part of which I saw. It was sent, I believe, to Mrs Temple, by whom I don't know, with the long letter from Mr Macdonald, which you yourself read in Paris. There was a thoughtless observation in it about my influence with Mrs Weir, and Jessie is very sorry she made it, but as for anything more of consequence having transpired through it, I am all but certain that it is impossible.'

'I wish I could believe it,' said John, earnestly. 'I wish to my heart I could believe it. But Macdonald, as you know, talks about it, and it is unquestionable that everything you and I planned was told immediately to Macdonald, and through him to his French friend, who came to Paris expressly, because he knew that I was daily expected, and was afraid that I might be working against him. Mrs Temple also, as you are aware, was sent there in the same way. It is a pity that you were not more cautious in what you wrote.'

'It is a pity,' I replied, 'yet what I said was very little; nothing, indeed, that I can remember, except that we meant to leave certain places on certain days, and that Miss Milicent was going to consult you about some of her affairs. And I wrote quite privately to Roger, thinking, of course, that nothing which was mentioned would go beyond our own circle. It never entered my head to say, "Don't show it to Jessie."''

'It did go beyond your own circle,' said John, 'but that is not your fault, Ursie. Only, indeed, I am very sorry about your sister-in-law.'

'But it is not true,' I said; 'forgive me for speaking hastily,

Mr Hervey, but I can't help it. It is all an exaggeration.' Then recollecting the short conversation which had passed between myself and M. Dalange at Andely, I added, 'M. Dalange once mentioned Jessie to me, and implied she had been staying at Dene, and that was entirely untrue. He thought, too, that I was a great friend of Mrs Price, which was another complete mistake. You see, one cannot depend upon any of them.'

'M. Dalange,' replied John, 'only wished to find out whether Macdonald was playing him true or false as to the persons from whom he professed to get his information. With regard to the note you mention, I can tell you how Mrs Temple got it. It was through the people who took Stonecliff. Mrs Price pressed an acquaintance with them, as I understand, and they, coming into a new neighbourhood, and not knowing anything about the residents, let her make up to them; and so, by degrees, as they grew more intimate, I suppose, they talked about Mrs Temple, and Mrs Weir, and all the family, and Mrs Price put them up to her notion of what was going on, and through them alarmed Mrs Temple, who, I believe, is a distant relation. The object of it all, of course, was to have you recalled.'

'I suppose it must have been so,' I said; 'but what motive could Mrs Price have had to interfere at all in the matter?'

'First of all, she hates you as much as she hates any one on the face of the earth,' said John. 'You have kept aloof from her, and made other people do the same; and she has never forgiven Jessie's marrying into your family; and if she could do you an injury, and make Roger and Jessie miserable, she would be only too glad. But besides this, I pretty well know that her husband was in a certain degree mixed up with Macdonald's speculation, and it was a matter of importance to her, therefore, to get hold of Miss Milicent's money, which, as long as you were there to watch, could not be done. But all this, Ursie, is comparatively nothing; I must again go back to the fact of the accusation against your sister-in-law, and say that it ought to be contradicted at once if it is untrue; and if it is not, the sooner it is crushed the better.'

'It is not true,' I again said.

'Well, then, some one must get a direct acknowledgment that it is false from Macdonald himself. Now, Ursie, if you think I might venture, I believe I could do so, and this very day. Macdonald leaves Dene to-morrow.'

'I don't know,' I said. 'To interfere without Roger's consent! I don't quite see how it could be done.'

'I was in hopes,' he said, 'that it might be the easiest way. I have Macdonald under my thumb, and, in his sober senses, he knows that full well. I could without difficulty bring him before a court of justice for being mixed up with the Frenchman's frauds. Anything that I insist upon his doing he will do, when he is sober, that is. And I am now going to Dene with the full determination of making him sign a paper retracting every word he had the audacity to utter against you and me last night. If you were quite sure, quite certain that the accusation against your sister-in-law is as unfounded as that brought against us, I could easily force him to retract it at the same time.'

If! In spite of Jessie's protestations and Roger's happiness, and the absence of anything that could be called proof to the contrary, I hesitated; and John perceived my hesitation, I am sure, but he could not bear to notice it. Neither could I bear to allude to it.

'I think,' I said, after a few moments' consideration, 'that you may very fairly tax him with exaggeration, and with having implied that his intelligence came direct from Jessie, when in fact he only learned it through Mrs Price. More than this I am afraid we cannot demand, for Jessie was incautious, and the letter to Mrs Price ought not to have been written at all.'

'It will be a great deal if we get that,' said John. 'Ursie, if you can only stop the acquaintance with Mrs Price, you will do a kinder act both toward Roger and Jessie than you at all imagine.'

I made no answer, for I felt very desponding.

'You are displeased with me, I am afraid,' he continued. 'I am interfering.'

His tone woke me up from a kind of dream. We were leaving facts; and feelings were dangerous ground.

Speaking quickly, and rather coldly, I said, 'Oh! no, indeed. You are very good to take so much trouble. I am sure Roger and we all shall be extremely obliged to you.'

It went like an arrow through me to see the pained expression of his face. He took up his hat, wished me good-bye, and did not even say that I should hear from him.

As the door closed behind him, my impulse was to rush after him, to beg him to return, to tell him that I thought him the

best, kindest, truest of friends; that I trusted him as I had never trusted any one except Roger; that if I could only see him happy I would be contented to be unhappy myself for the remainder of my life. But marry him! No, I had not come to that yet.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

ROGER came to me at the school, and walked with me to church. He was not so comfortable as when I left him in the morning. Jessie, he said, was so extremely depressed; she seemed to take so very much to heart the having been spoken of in that public manner, even by a person whom every one despised. 'And I am afraid,' he added, 'that a few words of mine may have increased her unhappiness. Poor little thing! she is so timid; and you know, Ursie, I have not been accustomed to deal with women of a timid mind, and what I feel I express strongly. I left her at last very miserable, because of something I said about the trust I had always hitherto placed in her, and the full confidence I had in her word; and she seemed to fancy that it implied some change now. I should scarcely have made up my mind to go away from her, only she put herself into a perfect agony about my missing church.'

'It certainly must be very strange to you,' I said, not quite knowing what other remark to make. 'You have had so very little to do with women.'

'Nothing, nothing at all, so to say; for I always felt, Trot, that you stood upon your own ground, and did not want petting and humouring. Lately I have thought,'—and he paused,—'I don't know that I have been quite wise with Jessie; she has been such a child to me always.'

'Perhaps,' I said gently, for I was not sure that he would be pleased to find me agreeing with him, 'it might have been better to put her in a more decided position of authority, and to have given her more responsibilities. But then, to be sure, that has been tried since I have been away.'

'Not exactly,' he said, in a quick tone; 'she might have done better, probably she would, if you had not been expected home every day, as it were. But matters of business were put off—'

and—I suppose it is natural—she likes going out. Young things a.ways do ; don't they ?'

I could almost have laughed,—it was a simplicity with which one would have been really inclined to find fault, but that it arose from an intense humility. He did literally feel quite ignorant about women, and was in a constant dread of being hard or exacting with his young wife.

'Dear Roger,' I said, 'you must really cease to look upon Jessie as a young thing, as you call her. When a woman marries she takes upon herself certain responsibilities ; and, whatever her youth may be, she can't shake them off. And you will not mind my saying that Jessie would be much happier in the end by being made to fulfil her duties than by being assisted in the endeavour to avoid them. And if,' I added, 'my being at Sandcombe in any way stands in the way of this, I needn't say to you that, let it be what pain it may to part, I shall be the first to propose it.'

'No, Ursie, never, never,' he exclaimed eagerly ; 'it is your home always. But you are right ; yes, you are right ; I do believe, in other ways, I have been a fool. I don't blame her, poor darling ! she was a child ; I could not have expected more.'

He became very silent after this. We were drawing near the church, and with his usual feeling of reverence, he was doubtless preparing himself to enter rightly upon the service. As I knelt by him, I heard the words of the confession repeated, oh ! so fervently, with such deep, deep humiliation. I felt that he was crowding into it all the errors of which he felt himself to have been guilty in his conduct towards Jessie. If there was one prayer on my lips uttered that afternoon more earnestly than any other, it was that God would give to them both the 'peace which the world cannot give ; that their hearts might be set to obey His commandments, and their time be passed in rest and quietness.'

When that prayer was made, I was comforted by the feeling that any unkind jealousy I might once have felt was melting away under the influence of true and unselfish affection.

It was growing dusk before we left the church, for we had a christening and a long sermon, and the days were short. As we walked back, I told Roger what had passed between John Hervey and me ; and he agreed that it might be better for John to interfere in the matter than for him. He could scarcely do it,

he said, without making what, perhaps, would be an unwise fuss ; and he had no such hold over Mr Macdonald as John possessed. We referred also to the conversation just before church. Roger was an energetic person in dealing with himself. He never, like some people, sat looking at a fault, and thinking that by looking he was destroying it. The moment he perceived anything to be amiss, he steadfastly set himself to subdue it ; and now, having begun to perceive that his love for Jessie was more self-indulgent than self-denying,—for that was the root of the matter when the case was examined,—he was determined to correct the evil without delay. He and I talked over many little ways in which we might bring Jessie round to a sense of her true position in the family, working at our object by degrees, for we both felt that it would not do, especially in her present weak state, to make any sudden change. ‘By and by,’ said Roger, ‘if it please God all should go well with her, there will be a claim upon her which no woman can put aside, and so she will naturally learn to be more managing, and exercise greater authority. I only hope, Ursie, she won’t come in your way.’

‘There is not much fear of that,’ I said. ‘I can mark out certain duties which ought to belong especially to me, and those I can attend to ; and you know, Roger, it is the principle we want from Jessie, more than the actual work. When she has a baby to attend to, she won’t be able to do so much in other ways, but as long as she feels herself responsible, it will not signify. You mustn’t quarrel with me,’ I added, ‘if sometimes I let things go wrong, just to show her that if she does not attend to them nobody else will. It seems to me rather spoiling a person, whether it may be Jessie or any one else, always to finish what is left undone. There are so many who are quite satisfied to see duties performed without troubling themselves to ask who does them. As I once heard Farmer Kemp say, “One-third of the world takes two-thirds of the world’s duties, and the other two-thirds share the remainder between them, and so the work is done, and every one thinks he has had his right share.”’

Roger laughed a little, and said the farmer was always severe upon idlers, but no doubt he was right ; adding, ‘I can’t think, however, that there is any lack of will for work in my Jessie.’

I agreed with him in a certain way, but I did not enter into what I felt to be the essential difference between Jessie’s view of life and mine. With me work was the object, and amusement the accident of existence ; with her, amusement was the object,

and work the accident. Roger would quite have agreed with me, but he would not have been pleased to be told that his wife differed. He was feeling very tenderly towards her, having discovered, as he supposed, in his own wrong management, the cause of all which of late had disturbed him; and in his noble unselfishness, being thankful to take the whole burden of blame upon himself, so that he might but spare her.

Roger and I entered the house together. I went into the parlour to warm myself, and have a little chat with William; and Roger, finding Jessie not there, ran up-stairs to her. I was afraid she was not so well, for William said she had kept to her room all the afternoon. We had said but a few words when Roger came down again. 'Jessie must be in the kitchen,' he observed, 'she is not up-stairs.'

'She was not there a minute ago,' I replied, 'for I looked in as I went by; but she may be in the scullery, or perhaps in the dairy.'

'She ought to keep quiet,' said Roger, anxiously. 'I must have her in directly;' and he hurried away.

We heard him call, and speak to the servants, and go out into the back yard, and then he came back again. 'She is not out,' he said; 'she must be up-stairs;' and now feeling a little fidgety myself, I followed him, and we went from room to room, but no Jessie was to be found. Roger grew very pale, very quiet, instead of rushing from one place to another, as he had done at first, he slowly opened every door, every closet, asked each of the servants separately where their mistress had last been seen, and then put on his hat and went out again. I dared not ask him what he thought, and I returned to the parlour.

'She is taking a little fresh air,' said William, as he sat comfortably by the parlour fire, not in the least disturbing himself. 'I never trouble myself about these matters, they are sure to come right.'

'Jessie is not so very fond of fresh air,' I said; 'all to-day she has been feeling so unwell.'

'All the more reason that she should want air,' he replied. 'Now, I remember, I did hear the front door close, soon after Roger went to church. I thought he might have come back for something, but I dare say it was Jessie.'

'She ought to be returned then by this time,' I said; 'hark! what is that?'

It was Roger's voice calling in the garden, clear and full, but sharpened by intense anxiety.

'I must go out to him,' I said; 'I can't bear this.' And I hurried out and joined him in the yard by the great barn.

'She is not here; she must have heard me if she had been,' he said. 'O Ursie!' and he put his hands to his forehead, and actually staggered against the wall, 'what does it mean?'

'She is ill, or she has taken some strange fancy in her head,' I said. 'Are you sure, Roger, that she was not frightened at anything when you left her?'

'Yes,' he exclaimed. 'She was frightened at me,—at me, who loved her better than life. Ursie, I don't know what I said to her, but she cried,—poor child! poor darling! God forgive me, I am a wretch.'

'She is gone to Dene,' I said. The words came out without thought, and they were scarcely uttered when Roger was to be seen in the dim twilight tearing up the lane like a madman.

It was in vain to follow him, I could not go back to William, and I went up-stairs to my own room. There sitting down, I strove to bring before my mind all which I dreaded.

But I could not steadily face anything. One fear after another crowded upon me, all connected with Jessie's insincerity and Mrs. Price's fatal influence. I felt certain Jessie was gone to Dene; but ill, weak, alone, in Roger's absence—there must be some very strong motive to lead her to such a step; she must at least have reckoned upon doing it secretly.

There was deception, and Roger must know it. His delusion would be at an end; and where then would be his happiness? My heart grew faint.

I remained by myself, praying, thinking, fearing, listening, and at last, remembering William, roused myself to the effort of going down-stairs again. I was glad I did, for William himself was by this time as anxious as I could be, and showing his anxiety by giving the most contradictory and senseless orders. Every corner and nook had been searched, both in the house and out of it, but he insisted upon the servants going round again, and was quite angry with me because I did not accompany them. I could have done so willingly for the sake of occupation; to sit still was unendurable, but my comfort was to dress myself in a cloak, go to the front door, and hearken, catching the hoarse murmur of the sea, and the moaning of the wind rushing across the downs, and thinking, as the sounds mingled with the nervous ringing in my ears, that I heard voices calling out that she was returned.

Seven o'clock came. Roger might have been to Dene and come back ; at any rate, it could not be long before he was with us. Whenever I went into the parlour, William sent me to listen again, and at last followed himself ; and we stood together at the house-door in silence.

William spoke first. There had been a sudden gust of wind followed by a lull. 'A cry, Ursie ; you heard it ?'

'No,' I said ; 'it was the wind.' I left him, and went forward a few paces, hearing nothing.

'There it is again !' called out William. But still all was silent to my ear.

William himself, when I went back to him, thought he had been deceived. I begged him to go in-doors, for it was bitterly cold, and rather reluctantly he consented, and was just turning away when both of us at the same moment exclaimed, 'Yes, there is some one.' And William called again, whilst I ran into the house to tell Joe Goodenough to take a lantern, and go out.

'It is John Hervey's voice,' said William, when I rejoined him ; and my heart sank. I thought it must surely have been Roger with Jessie. Whoever it might be, the time seemed endless before Joe had lighted his lantern, and gone forth ; and then I thought he moved as though his feet were clogged. 'Give me the light ; let me take it, and you follow,' I exclaimed, throwing my cloak over my head ; and the man did as I bade, striding after me as I ran up the lane. When we were at the top, and on the green down, I told my companion to shout, and his call was immediately answered. The voice came from the right, in the direction of Dene ; and I went on, till I reached the green pathway in the side of the down, and then ran down as hard as I could. I saw no one ; but before I had gone about a couple of hundred yards, a voice from amidst the furze and fern which clothed the steep descent at the side of the path, called out, 'Holloa ! who's there ? Stay, will you, and lend a helping hand.'

'Mr Hervey !' I exclaimed.

'Ursie !' was uttered almost at the same moment.

'Where are you ? What do you want ?' I inquired.

'Are you alone ? Hold the light this way.' And doing as I was bid, whilst bending forward to peer into the darkness, I saw John Hervey, with something in his arms, struggling to make his way up the ascent.

Joe was by his side before I could tell what was to be done ;

and John Hervey called out in a cheerful voice, 'We shall do now,—all right she will come to herself again presently.'

'What! Jessie?'

He made no answer, for he was breathless; but having such good help, in a few moments he was at the top of the bank, with his motionless burden.

'She is dead!' I exclaimed in horror, as I put the lantern to her face.

'Not at all that, ma'am,' said Joe; 'she is only in a kind of faint. We'll soon have her home;' and, with John's assistance, he raised her again, so as to carry her more conveniently between them, and they went on. I asked no questions, for I felt it was not the moment.

She was taken into the house, carried up to her room, and laid upon the bed. No doubt she had fainted, but it was a worse state of faintness than usual. She revived for a few moments, but only to die away, as it were, again. John and William stayed outside the door. I saw they were both extremely uneasy. I heard William asking questions, but I could not attend to the answers; all my thoughts were given to Jessie. After a few minutes I made up my mind to send into Hove for a doctor. It might not be necessary, but at any rate it was safe, and Joe was ordered to ride off directly. John Hervey said he would go out and look for Roger, who most likely was out upon the downs. I wanted to get Jessie regularly into bed before Roger came. I felt he would be less frightened then. But before I could manage this, a hasty step on the stairs, and a quick but very gentle knock, told that Roger was returned. I opened the door, and, without speaking to me, he went up directly to the bed, and stood looking at his wife for some moments. She is better now,' I said; 'we will get her into bed; and I have sent for the doctor from Hove. You had better go down, and leave her to me.' Still he did not answer; but he bent down, and kissed Jessie's poor, little, pale face, and parted her hair from her forehead, and lifted her in his arms, that I might unfasten her dress; and I heard him whisper, 'Jessie, my Jessie, just smile once.' But though she opened her eyes, it was not as though she knew him, and they were immediately closed again.

I told Roger to go down-stairs, and said I would call him again when I was ready.

He moved away, but it was only to go outside the door, and pace up and down the passage.

Martha and I undressed Jessie, and put her into bed, but she never spoke or looked at us in any way as though she was conscious, only she moaned a good deal, and I began to fear that she must have met with some bad accident, although there were no broken limbs.

'We will make the room comfortable, and then leave your master to watch her,' I said to Martha, and I began putting away the things, and sent Martha to fetch some more water. Roger came into the room as Martha went out. He sat down by the bed, and I came and stood by him with Jessie's dress in my hand. The pocket was heavy, and I took the things out of it and laid them on the bed, one by one; her thimble, and a little pocket-book, and needlecase, and pincushion, and, at last, a packet of letters, some of which fell to the ground. Roger picked them up; something made me look at him just then; one letter was in his hand; he was holding it to the light. The expression of his face I shall never forget. I can't describe it; I don't know what it said, but it was so ghastly,—so terrible, that I uttered a faint scream, and caught the letter from him.

The address was, 'Lieutenant Macdonald, Dene.' The writing was Jessie's.

I examined the others; they were all alike. There must have been at least a dozen.

Roger and I looked at each other, but we said not a word. I referred to the post-mark, it was nearly illegible. 'They must be old ones,' I said. 'Won't you look?'

Without answering, he collected all the letters together, went to his writing-desk, took out a sheet of paper, and carefully folded them within it, sealed the packet, and directed it, whilst I stood by him, and then put it in his pocket. The address was 'For Jessie Grant; from her husband.'

He did not look at Jessie again, but left the room.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

ABOUT ten o'clock Joe Goodenough returned with the doctor. I went to tell Roger of it. He was in a little spare room close by mine. He came out directly. I did not notice any alteration of manner greater than the circumstances of Jessie's

illness would account for easily. We were both present when John Hervey told the story of where he had found her, lying senseless at the bottom of the steep bank. He supposed she must have missed her footing in the dusk, and fallen. William made the awkward remark that he could not see what business she had there, and inquired of Roger whether she had been at Dene.

'Yes,' was the short reply, and the tone was such as to silence even William.

Roger did not go up-stairs with us, but when the doctor had seen Jessie he waited for him in the passage, and I heard him ask Mr Harrison what he thought.

'She has had a bad accident,' was the answer; 'you must take great care of her; especially if there should be symptoms of fever. I will come over again to-morrow.'

This was all we could get from him. There was no intimation, whether we had anything to fear.

William remarked, when Mr Harrison was gone, that Roger took it very quietly. John Hervey came up to me, and said, 'Ursie, can you let me tell you what I have done?'

We went together into the large parlour. I sat down, prepared to hear what was painful. John began, nervously: 'I am troubling you, Ursie; I would not do it now, but it may be of consequence. See,' and he drew a paper from his pocket; 'Macdonald has retracted every word about you and me, he won't retract about Jessie.'

'Let it go,' I exclaimed. 'Mr Hervey, it is very miserable.'

'Very,' he said, kindly, but with a certain shyness of manner, as he added, 'You won't mind my saying I feel for you.'

I wanted comfort so very, very much; I felt as though I must have it at all risks, and I held out my hand to him, and answered, 'O Mr Hervey! you have always helped us in other troubles, but you can't help us in this.'

It seemed that he was afraid to accept my friendliness, and he rather drew back, and said, 'Her accident may be a blessing; it will keep her quiet, and the gossip may blow over.'

'But it won't set all right with Roger,' I exclaimed: 'and that is all I care for.'

'All?' he said, in a tone of surprise.

'Yes!' I repeated, 'all. There is nothing to be said of Jessie which any one but Roger has a right to take notice of.'

And then, as the words escaped my lips, the remembrance of

the packet of letters flashed across me, and a sudden feeling of faint terror came over me, which made me lean back in my chair, and put my hand up to my head.

John did not appear to see what I was suffering. I am sure he was keeping a strict guard over himself, and so indeed was I now. His cautiousness made me ashamed of the feeling which I had for one moment expressed. He asked me what was to be said to Roger. I had not thought of this before, and it was a serious difficulty. I longed to escape the task, but it was cowardly, and I said, 'Leave it to me, and I will manage it;' then I stood up to show that the interview was over, and John wished me 'good night,' and we parted.

I was standing by Jessie's bed, as I heard the farm-yard gate close, and knew that he was gone. I did not understand before how dreary my heart could be without him.

The opportunity for mentioning the result of John Hervey's interview with Mr Macdonald was not given me, as Roger must have guessed it without being told; he never exchanged one word with me upon that subject or the letters, and of course I could not introduce the matter.

No mother could have been more thoughtful, tender, helpful, than he was in the long weeks of nursing which followed Jessie's accident. He sat up at night, gave her all her medicine, moved her pillows, watched her, whenever he was able to give up his time to her, with an unremitting attention; but the ghastly look of wretchedness never left his face, and, by degrees, I saw it settle into a fixed impress, which set wrinkles in his forehead, and marked dark lines about his mouth, so that persons who saw him only for a moment were heard to say, 'Roger Grant's anxiety for his wife is breaking his heart.'

There was cause for anxiety, independent of any secret grief. Jessie was more ill than any person I had ever up to that time seen, who was not very near death. She knew us all, especially Roger; but I think she scarcely had a clear recollection of anything which had passed immediately before her accident. At any rate she was too weak to allude to it. She was hovering between life and death, and the doctor said that the birth of her child would certainly, according to all human calculation, determine the point. In the meantime the slightest agitation would be fatal. Every one was very kind to me. Mrs Kemp and Mary came over to see me frequently. Mary's marriage was to take place sooner than had been anticipated, and though they

were, in consequence, very busy, they always found time to spare for me. I made Mrs Kemp tell me all she heard. I thought it was right to know what kind of impression had gone abroad respecting Jessie's accident. Some remarks I was sure would be made, from the stories repeated by the servants. Mrs Kemp told me she had heard all kinds of contradictory things. Some quite absurd, such as that Jessie and Roger had quarrelled, and she had run away from him, and had gone to take refuge with Mrs Price. The fact that she had been at Dene that Sunday afternoon was undeniable, for the servants had admitted her into the house, and said she looked scared and wild, so that they were quite frightened to see her. There was another corroboration of that circumstance, which I knew only too well. No doubt, excited and distressed by Roger's expressions of confidence, knowing that at the time of her marriage she had deceived him, and that her letters could at any moment be produced against her,—she must have felt that at all risks they were to be obtained and destroyed.

This was a probable reason for her conduct, but was it all?

John Hervey came to see us much more frequently. He was still just as constrained in manner, but his was such a kind heart, that at any sacrifice to himself he would have done whatever he thought might add to another's comfort. And there were many things in which he was now of the greatest use—giving Roger help in matters connected with the farm, and undertaking business for him which might lie at a distance. Nothing was a trouble to him, and many times my heart smote me as I felt what use I made of him, and yet what a poor return I could offer him. Thanks, only thanks and gratitude; so I said to myself still; and I thought I was sufficiently careful over my words and actions, and never showed how much I rested upon him, lest my manner should be misinterpreted. I think there was something of pride within me, which forbade me to acknowledge to myself that he was becoming at all dearer to me. He was so unlike my ideal of what I could love; so different from Roger; so much more approachable; and resembling every one else! And then I had often made up my mind that it would be quite impossible for me to love any one as well as I once loved Roger, and anything short of that would be unsatisfactory. I had long set myself down as a confirmed old maid, and I did not choose this notion of myself to be disturbed. It was all very well in theory; quite natural and necessary, so it seemed to me; but I had left out one

most important item in my calculations—the knowledge of John Hervey's love. I did not think about it; I even tried to put it entirely aside; but whenever in moments of dreariness I looked round the world for comfort, and amongst all my friends and relations found none, not even Roger to love me best, I turned uneasily to the true, honest, devoted heart, which one word or look might, as I knew, make my own possession for ever; and the thought of being the wife of John Hervey no longer struck me as an impossibility.

But I am wandering on too far. Those feelings were of slow growth, and very secretly developed in my own sight; and as day by day went on, each brought its burden to occupy my mind; whilst Roger's face was alone sufficient to make me feel as though it were a sin even for a moment to dream of future happiness. I heard often from Miss Milicent, and the accounts were upon the whole satisfactory. She enjoyed the travelling, and was learning, as she said, to put up with Mrs Temple. But there was no feeling which would enable them to live together for a continuance; and in every letter Miss Milicent reverted to the hope I had held out of being able at last to establish herself in a home of her own at Compton.

'I have a thought, Ursie,' she wrote to me, in a letter dated from Dresden, 'of settling myself some day at the Heath. I don't know where the money is to come from, for I have not a penny to spare, having just paid two shares of our journey here, because Matilda Temple said it was fair, as she only came for me, that I might see the pictures. I don't care for pictures enough to pay so much for them; but that is no matter—anything to keep the peace; and I don't forget that in former days I spent money to please myself, and so it is not to be wondered at if now I am obliged to do it to please others. But you see, Ursie, I have a double share of hope to what some people have; and so I believe that somehow the way will turn up for what I wish. In the meantime, I satisfy myself by thinking about it; and if it does not come at last, why, no doubt there will be something else in its stead. I am obliged to think in this way, or Matilda Temple's doings would drive me daft.'

The Heath would be a very pleasant home for Miss Milicent. I already fancied I saw her established there; but she, like myself, had probably an ordeal to pass before rest could be attained.

And what did Jessie feel all this time? That was a question

which I put to myself many times, but to which I never found an answer. I think her weakness and the feeling of illness must have been such, that she could scarcely have collected her ideas sufficiently to think, in any strict sense of the word ; otherwise she could scarcely have borne Roger's presence ; still less have endured his waiting upon her with that quiet, sad thoughtfulness which made me wretched whenever I saw him approach her. She went through the forms of religion. Roger read a little to her every day, and prayed with her ; and Mr Richardson came very frequently, and once proposed to administer the Holy Communion ; but she seemed to shrink from this, and no one ventured to press it upon her ; the doctor had given such strict injunctions about keeping her from anything that might agitate her. It was a relief to Roger, as I fancied, to have it delayed ; and so it was to me in a certain way. If she was not conscious and penitent, it would have been such a mockery ; and yet it was very terrible to see her gliding on, as one might say, to what might too probably be death ; and never to be allowed to hint at anything, past or present, which might reveal to us the state of her mind, burdened as we knew it must be. How often I thought then of the warning not to put off repentance to a sick bed. I had heard it so many times in sermons, but it never touched me in the way it did then.

And with all this great uneasiness about Jessie's state, was mingled so much true affection. I don't speak of Roger. No earthly being, I am sure, could penetrate into the depths of the love which he still felt. His was a heart which might break, but could not change ; but for myself, Jessie was to me really a younger sister ; her faults did not shock me. I had known them for years. Even their bitter consequences were scarcely a surprise to me, and now, as I saw her lying so helpless and suffering, waiting, like a criminal under sentence of execution, for the hour which might bring death, and a death for which I could not but fear she was unprepared, every tender feeling of sympathy was increased a hundredfold, and there were moments when I knelt beside her bed in anguish of spirit, praying that God would yet be merciful to her, and pardon, and spare her.

CHAPTER LXXX.

AND so time went on, and we thought we were all ready, and believed that every possibility had been provided against. Some one sat up with her every night. I had taken my turn, and, feeling very much worn out, went to bed, leaving the nurse with Jessie. I must have slept very soundly. I think I had an indistinct consciousness of unusual sounds; but no one came to call me, and, though generally on the alert at the least disturbance, it was dawn before I awoke, and, starting up with a sudden impulse of anxiety, hurried to Jessie's room. The door was ajar. I saw Roger kneeling by the bedside, his eyes fixed upon Jessie's face, stamped with the impress of death. The nurse was standing with her back towards me. As I softly entered, she turned round, and laid in my arms her little burden,—Jessie's baby.

I don't think at the first moment I quite understood what had happened; it seemed all so unexpected, so bewildering. I gave back the baby to the nurse, and went round to Roger, and knelt down by him, and put my arm round him; but he had no look or voice for me. As though by his steadfast gaze he could arrest the hand of death, he remained still in the same posture, with Jessie's hand clasped in his, his face as pale, his form as motionless as hers. I beckoned to the nurse to give me the infant again, and asked what had been done about the doctor.

'He must be here directly,' was the reply; 'he was sent for, but he must have been out elsewhere.'

'Can nothing be done?' I asked.

The nurse shook her head.

'Have you no hope?'

She drew me aside, that Roger might not hear, and whispered, 'None.'

I sat down by the fire. Martha was in the room also. She offered to take the baby from me. But I would not part with it. A new, clinging affection had, in a moment, sprung up within me; it seemed all that was left to give me comfort.

The doctor came. He spoke to the nurse and to Roger. I sat apart and watched whilst he inquired into Jessie's state. I think I was the first person who saw the expression in his countenance, which told that he did not despair, and I uncovered the face of my little treasure, and pressed a kiss upon its velvet forehead,

whilst I whispered a prayer of unutterable thankfulness. As I glanced at Roger, I saw that his hope was not like mine ; he had too much depending upon the issue.

Jessie's life hung upon a thread. We had known that for many weeks ; but the fact had never been present to us as it was during the few days which followed the birth of her child. It was a suspense continued without interruption from hour to hour, for there were no seasons of rallying, or of any visible improvement ; only one stagnant condition, if one may so call it, about which the utmost that could be said was, that it was not entirely devoid of hope. And during this time, the care of the child, making arrangements for a nurse, watching over it, even loving it, seemed to be left entirely to me. I think that to Roger it must have seemed the herald of its mother's death ; for when the nurse once forced him to take it in his arms, and said he might be proud of his little daughter, who would no doubt grow up to be a comfort to him, he kissed it fondly, and then put it from him, as though he could not bear to look at it.

After the first week, the doctor spoke more cheerily, and told us that the worst was over. The news brought joy to every heart at Sandcombe, except, as it seemed, to Roger's. Relieved he was, and thankful ; but there was a deepening gloom on his brow which no effort could shake off, and I saw that by degrees he kept away from Jessie's room, except when some one else was there ; whilst, whenever the remark as to the child's likeness to its mother was made before him, he turned it off with a laugh which actually grated upon my ear. I longed to make him talk to me ; I felt that perhaps together we might extract some comfort from the facts which we both knew, and sometimes I thought whether he would not be justified, under the circumstances, in opening the letters, and satisfying himself as to the extent of the deception which had been practised upon him. But that was not like Roger. With his power of self-control, his strength of will and endurance, he would have borne the torture of the drop of water falling upon his head moment by moment, and never by the slightest impulse of impatience have striven to hasten the hour appointed for the cessation of his agony.

The only comfort I had was that I believed I thoroughly understood him, and knew exactly what he feared. To have been deceived—that was his bitterness ; and if Jessie had laid herself open to the worst condemnation of the world, the heart

of a man like Roger could scarcely have been more utterly crushed.

That particular time was more distressing to me than any which went before it. In great danger there is great excitement. There was none now. The future lay before me chill and blank both for Roger and myself, for if he was miserable how could I be happy? The explanation with Jessie, which at a distance I had sometimes fancied might succeed in restoring confidence, must, I felt, as we approached it, end wretchedly; and as Jessie gradually regained her strength, I had a cowardly feeling of relief each day that the subject was delayed, and yet a longing, at times almost uncontrollable to rush into it at once, and hear and know the worst.

So I think it must have been with Jessie likewise. Yet I could not tell whether she was summoning courage to speak to Roger, or whether indeed she perfectly remembered all that had happened before her illness. Her reserve was most painful, and sometimes I thought it was becoming a fixed habit of mind which would end in complete depression. Her baby was the only thing she seemed to live for; for her fear of Roger was evident. At times I could have been almost jealous of her claim upon the child. It was the first baby that had been given to us as a family, and many probably will understand how great is the feeling which such circumstances may create. Every night before we went to bed William made me take him to the cradle, that he might kiss the little thing as it lay asleep; and most touching it was to observe the softening of his rough features, and the lowering of his voice, as he bent over, straining his darkened eyes to catch just the outline of its little form. For myself it was Roger's child, and when I held it in my arms and felt its tiny fingers helplessly clasping mine, a thrill of unspeakable tenderness passed over me, which, though it could not have been a mother's love, must have been something very nearly approaching to it.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

JESSIE had been out for the first time, wrapped in the white shawl, Mrs Weir's wedding-gift; the day was deliciously warm for the season and Roger had procured a little hand-car-

riage for her, that she might be drawn up and down the garden. William, Roger, and I were with her.

I had the baby in my arms as usual. We were standing round Jessie, and I was feeling painfully that I was making an effort to enjoy the brightness. William had lately become quite a relief to us; he was some one to be attended to, his spirits were improved, and he was interested in things not connected with us, and so gave us other subjects of conversation than those on which our thoughts were dwelling.

Jessie did not speak at all,—Roger very little; the conversation was kept up between William and me.

‘When is Mary Kemp’s wedding to come off, Ursie?’ he asked.

‘This day three weeks,’ I replied, ‘and she has asked me to be bridesmaid. I should like it, only, really, I cannot afford a new dress.’

‘Why you must have that which you wore at Jessie’s wedding,’ said William. ‘I am sure you have not been gay enough since to spoil it. Or if you want anything very smart, and likely to be cheap, I advise you to go and try for some of Mrs Price’s gowns. I did not tell you, Roger, the news which Joe Goodenough brought in just now,—that the Prices have all gone smash, and everything they have is to be sold.’

Jessie uttered an exclamation of distress. Roger said very quietly, ‘Indeed!’ and stood further aloof from Jessie.

‘O William!’ I observed reproachfully, as I saw that Jessie was much upset, ‘you shouldn’t have told it so abruptly.’

‘Why not?’ he replied; ‘Jessie is not such a goose as really to care for those people, and all the world have known what must come. Macdonald is in for it, too; so they will be all out of the country soon, and there will be no more gossip, which will be one comfort for you, Jessie, my dear. Your friends would have got you into a scrape if they could. By the by, Ursie,’ he added, ‘I never quite understood whether John Hervey made Macdonald retract what he said that night at Hove. I remember I asked, and you only gave me a kind of blundering answer.’

Roger turned round shortly, ‘Jessie has been out long enough; it is time she should go in.’

‘Would you like it, dear?’ I asked, as I arranged the cushion for her at the back of the chair.

‘She had better go in,’ repeated Roger. The tone of his voice struck William.

‘Why, your husband is growing quite fierce, Jessie,’ he said. ‘I would not let him be such a tyrant.’

Jessie trembled all over,—she tried to speak, but I could not hear her words.

‘I have not had my question answered yet,’ said William, in a persisting tone. ‘If John Hervey has not got Macdonald’s written words, Roger ought to insist upon them himself; only he is such a tame-spirited fellow.’

I saw Roger start, and a storm of indignation crossed his face. The expression was still there, when he drew near Jessie and said, ‘I shall take you in.’ She looked up at him,—she kept her eyes fixed upon him. It was as though she were paralysed by fear. I feared also,—yet Roger’s momentary excitement was quite subdued.

‘I will tell you about it another time,’ I said to William. ‘Just now I must go with Jessie.’ Something was wrong, William saw then; he asked nothing more. Jessie made me walk by her side; when we went into the house, and Roger lifted her out of the chair, she still clung to me; but I had the child in my arms, and was not able to support her. After attempting to mount the stairs in vain, Roger took her in his arms, and carried her to her room. Then he left us together.

Jessie lay on the sofa. I put the baby into the cradle, and asked if I could get anything for her. She refused; it was not being tired, she said,—she did not want anything; but the trembling agitation increased.

‘You must see Roger,’ I said, at length, and I looked at her steadily. I think she must have understood me, for she put her hand across her forehead, as if to clear her thoughts.

Some one knocked at the door. It was Roger; I did not dare look at him. He put into my hand a note and the packet of letters, and went away, and I returned back to Jessie. She had recognised his step. I heard her murmur to herself, as I opened the note, ‘He won’t come to me,—he will leave me,—God help me.’

The note was written in pencil, and was scarcely legible. ‘Give them to her, Ursie. I have never looked at them. I never will. From this hour the subject shall never be mentioned to her again.’

Jessie watched my face,—she caught the note from me and read it twice. As she gazed at me in bewilderment, I put the packet into her hands. She broke the seal.

The expression of her countenance was not fear or sorrow, but a cold, calm despair.

'You see,' I said, bitterly; 'there is nothing to fear,—he has not read them.'

Without replying, she rose from the sofa as if a new impulse of strength had been given her, and moved towards the door.

'You will not find him,' I said, and I tried to prevent her from going out. She sat down again quite still,—upright.

The baby began to cry, but she took no notice; her face was quite stony. I felt frightened, and thought I would rouse her. 'Shall I put them away for you?' I said, taking up the letters.

Her only answer was, 'Let me go to him.'

'No,' I said, 'he will come to you, if you wish to see him,—shall I call him?'

She did nothing to stop me, and I went down-stairs. Roger was waiting below. I motioned to him to follow me. When he stood at the threshold of Jessie's room I drew back.

'No,' he said, quietly. 'Ursie, I have no secrets,' and he went in after me, and stood waiting for Jessie to speak.

It was like a dreadful dream to me. I looked from one to the other,—but there was no hope or comfort in either face.

Twice Jessie tried to speak, and each time her voice was stopped.

'Roger,' I said at length, 'she has done very wrong, but she will acknowledge it.'

He pointed to the note. 'I have said it—I know nothing.

'Speak to him,' I began, turning to Jessie, 'tell him'—

But Roger stopped me: 'Ursie, I cannot hear,—I wish for no extorted confidence. Jessie, from this moment the past is buried.'

The sound of Jessie's own name seemed to break the spell which bound her. She drew near to Roger, and laying the letters before him, said, though without the least softening of the stony expression of misery, 'Read them.'

He pushed them from him.

'It is just,—right,' I exclaimed; 'Roger, you must read them.'

'They can make no difference,' he said, coldly.

Jessie turned to me imploringly.

'He has been deceived, Jessie,' I said; 'you must forgive him.'

Roger moved as if to go, but Jessie caught his arm. 'Will you be unjust?' she said.

He took up one of the letters and opened it, but the paper seemed to be burning to his touch.

'Read, Ursie,' said Jessie, 'read them all, every word; they were written long ago, all except one.'

She sat down, hiding her face in her hands.

Roger's eye glanced rapidly over the first letter,—then he proceeded to read the others, slowly, in the manner of a judge receiving evidence. As he read, he handed each letter to me. No one spoke, the baby had ceased crying, and the only sound heard was that of the rustling paper; and still Jessie never looked up, as we sat before her, perusing these evidences of her folly and deceit.

They were letters written to Mr Macdonald, after the time when I had fully understood, from what she told me, that she had refused him; and they were carried down to within one week of her acceptance of Roger. They were childish and foolish, complaining of the interference of her friends, and the hardness of her fate; and although there was no open declaration of her feeling for Mr Macdonald, there was certainly enough in them to make any man suppose that she was much attached to him. Besides these there was one short note, written after her marriage, begging him to return the letters.

The last letter was read by Roger and laid upon the table. I ventured then to glance at him. His countenance was unaltered, except for its ashy paleness, and the look of his eye, which made me tremble. I gathered the letters together, and mechanically said, 'Thank you, dear,' and then I stooped down and kissed Jessie. Indeed, I pitied her so much, I could not do otherwise. She turned aside from me, and, slowly rising, went and stood before Roger.

'I have deceived you,' she said firmly, 'but not as you think. You asked me if I could give you my full, free affection, and I said 'Yes.' It was true; true then, as it is now, true in the sight of God. Roger, I have never loved any one but you; but, O Ursie!' and she turned to me, and leaning her head upon my shoulder, sobbed convulsively, 'you warned me, and I would not listen. I did not care for Mr Macdonald, but I liked having his letters, and writing, and flirting; so I would not say entirely "No;" or at least, though I did say it, I still let him believe I was not in earnest. Things went on much farther than I ever intended.

Only when Roger asked me to marry him, my eyes seemed to open ; I had never thought it could be, it seemed too great happiness. I told him I was wicked, and that I should disappoint him. I could not say anything else. I thought if I confessed to him what I had done, and if he were to see the letters, he would suppose I cared for Mr Macdonald,—and I did not really. I was afraid it would turn his heart from me, and so I said nothing about them. When I was married, I thought Mr Macdonald would destroy the letters, and everything would be forgotten. He promised me he would ; he wrote me a note saying so. Ursie, you will remember my having it. Mrs Price gave it to me when we were together in Hove. But he was false to me, he kept them, and I think—I am nearly sure—Mrs Price made him do it. She talked to me about them, and frightened, and made me miserable ; and I could never get them back. Sometimes they were promised me, but they were never given. Oh ! it has been so wretched ! so wretched ! They both forced me to do whatever they liked, for they said that at any moment they could make Roger hate me. When you were away, Ursie, they were always forming plans for me to meet them, and be with them, and requiring me to tell everything I knew about you, and what you were doing in France. I knew I ought not, but I dared not refuse. I felt as though I was a spy upon you, but I could not draw back. At last—I don't know how I did it—I was nearly mad—that night that Roger came from Hove, and the next day—the Sunday—it seems all misty, but I got the letters. I think Mr Hervey had been there and frightened them ; I don't know—only—her voice became forced and hollow—‘ I told them I would never return to my home without them ; and it was true, I would have died first.

She paused, faint and breathless.

‘ Confession was all that was required, from the beginning, dear Jessie,’ I said.

‘ And I would have confessed,’ she said, sinking into a chair, and clasping my hand, whilst still keeping her eyes fixed upon Roger. ‘ I meant then to have told all ; I would have done so now, lately, but, Ursie, I knew he had them. I saw it in his face.’

‘ And the note which I saw in Paris,’ I said, doubtfully ; ‘ was that really not to Mr Macdonald ?’

‘ Indeed not, indeed it was as I told you ; but I equivocated. I was obliged to send messages, and answer questions ; he did

hear many things from me, though I never wrote, except that one note, which you have seen,—never, that is, since I have been Roger's wife. O Ursie! won't you believe me?'

Poor child! it was impossible not to believe her then. But what wretchedness had vanity and want of moral courage brought upon her!

'Speak to him for me, Ursie,' she whispered; 'tell him I will go where he likes, he shall never see me again;' and as she said the words, I saw her glance at the cradle, and a shudder shook her frame.

I went up to Roger. 'She has confessed all,' I said; 'Roger, it is for you to forgive.'

He answered, 'I have told her; the past is buried.'

'Not buried, but forgiven!' exclaimed Jessie, and she threw herself at his feet; 'else let me leave you.'

'Buried,' repeated Roger. 'We are man and wife, and none can part us.'

'Roger,' I said, 'God does not deal so with us.'

'Forgiveness means confidence,' was his reply.

'I do not ask confidence!' she exclaimed. 'O Roger, no! Distrust me, watch me, I will bear it all, all,—everything. I will thank you, and bless you. Only, can you never love me again?'

His face expressed agony, yet not relenting. She held him—she clung to him—her look was piteous in its anguish. When still he turned from her she slowly arose, and, going to the cradle, lifted her baby from it, and again kneeling before him, said, in a tone of quiet despair, 'Roger, I am its mother.' I saw him bend down and kiss her; I watched the large tears fall upon the face of his unconscious child, and heard him say, 'Jessie, may God forgive us both!'—and then I left them.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

I WALKED that afternoon to St Anne's Hill. I stood by the tower of the oratory, and gazed over the sea towards the white cliffs, and the dim island in the far distance; and I looked upon the tower of Compton church, and the cottages in the village, and the remains of the ruined abbey; and, as I looked, my

thoughts travelled back through my life, and I read it as it had been in the pages of a book. I thought how changed I was since those early years when I had first learned to love the view from St Anne's, how then it had been associated with but one interest and one affection, and how that affection had disappointed me, and the hopes which I had cherished had crumbled into dust. I remembered my own character as it was then, and I saw how, by means of that disappointment, I had been chastened, and trained for higher duties, and truer views of my position in the world.

I thought of Mrs Weir, her long suffering; her patient saintliness, and the lesson for eternity which had been taught me through her means. I knew that, as she had said, when speaking of herself, I had not had one trial too much, not one that could have been spared. And then my mind turned to others, and I marked how the same discipline was being carried on with them. I saw, or fancied I saw, how even Roger, with all his goodness and nobleness of disposition, had suffered himself to be blinded by feeling, and how the sorrow had now come upon him, which, with all its mercy, was surely mingled with judgment. I felt that he could never be as he had been; that a new life was to begin for him, and for Jessie; a life full of watchfulness, and effort, and self-restraint, and endurance; and as I pondered upon all these things, my heart insensibly became burdened with the sense of an awful reality, a perception of that wonderful fact, that the events of life are in themselves nothing, that they are but the body, destined to decay; yet that each, however trifling, bears within it the seed that is to exist for eternity; and I felt that I could yield myself passively to any circumstances, whether happy or unhappy, neither wearying myself with regrets for the past, nor burdening myself with cares for the future, so only that the present moment might add its grain of faith and holiness, to the treasure garnered in the hand of God against the Great Day of account.

At that moment I had no visions for myself of any happiness in this world which might yet be in store for me. I thought that I had accepted my lot from God, both as regarded myself and those I loved; and that I did not even wish for change; and in that mood of mind I descended the hill, and wandered on over the down, till I reached the tall column at its extremity, and was close upon the woods of Dene. There I met with John Hervey. He had passed through the grounds, for the place was

deserted; Captain Price, his wife, Mr Macdonald, the servants, were all gone. Everything was given up to satisfy the claims of creditors. John asked me to go with him into the garden, he wished to speak to the man who had charge of it. It did not enter my mind to refuse; what I did seemed unimportant, and I was less watchful and conscious with him than I had been. Perhaps, too, I liked his society; perhaps it was cheering to me. Doubtless, if I had felt as I did when we parted in France, I should have been less easily persuaded, but I was not thinking of myself at all, and scarcely of him; my thoughts were all with Roger and Jessie.

And so were his, at least in appearance. He made me turn with him, and walk up and down the stone pavement under the verandah, and then he spoke to me openly about all that had lately occurred. He touched upon my own feelings with regard to Roger and Jessie. He put before me all that I had thought, and feared, and all that I had hoped; he seemed to know everything by instinct. He told me that I had given my best affections to Roger, and demanded of him in return more than any brother could give. He said that I had formed my ideas of happiness without regard to the ordinary arrangements of God's providence, and that in consequence I had had much to bear. He warned me that I must prepare myself to see Roger suffer greatly from disappointment, for that his eyes must open by degrees to Jessie's character; and though she might improve, she could never be the wife whom he might naturally have expected to find. And then he commented, and, as I thought, severely, upon the fact of Jessie's conduct which he himself had learned.

The subjects were such as I could not have imagined myself able to endure from any one, when handled so plainly; and yet I did bear them from John Hervey. He had a way of putting what he said—I think it was from his simple, honest goodness of heart—which made me feel that he would never wilfully misunderstand; and he led me on till—I hope it was no breach of confidence—I found myself telling him at last the scene which had occurred that morning. It seemed only justice to Jessie; his suspicions were likely to go beyond the truth, and I could not bear him to be hard upon her.

He heard what I had to say without interruption; when I had finished he paused for some moments in thought; then he said, 'And Roger has forgiven?'

‘Quite,’ I replied. ‘Quite, I believe; I hope so.’

‘He is a noble fellow,’ continued John. ‘Ursie, he is better than I could be.’

‘And better than I could be,’ I said.

‘Once deceived, always deceived,’ said John.

And I added, ‘Yes, where one has loved.’

‘You are right, where one has loved,’ he continued. ‘Forgiveness is an easy matter when the heart is not wounded. So, Ursie, I should be very cautious; I should take a long time before I risked my happiness in marriage. There must have been an intimate knowledge, careful observation, the experience of many circumstances of trial. In a matter of life or death,—and marriage in my eyes is that, and nothing short of it,—there must be no chance of failure.’

‘Roger thought he was right,’ I said.

‘I don’t blame him; it would be very presumptuous. But, Ursie, I could not have done like him.’

‘I don’t think you could,’ was my reply. Roger is so trusting.’

He paused as though hurt by the remark; then he said, ‘Trust is either wisdom or folly, according as it is founded upon reason. Let my reason be convinced that I have grounds for trust, and I hope, I know, I could give it fully and heartily.’

I did not reply. Something in his tone and manner made my heart beat quickly.

He turned to me suddenly. ‘Don’t you believe me, Ursie?’

‘Yes, yes; but’——

‘But what?’

‘No one can be quite certain of what another is; and you will think you have found perfection, —— and’ ——

‘Well!’

‘There must be faults; marriage must be a lottery.’

‘No, Ursie, no; not always. Where one has watched, and loved long, and waited patiently, and prayed earnestly’—— he stopped.

‘I trust it may not be a lottery with you,’ I answered, and my voice trembled.

‘It cannot be,’ he exclaimed, impetuously. ‘Ursie,’ he paused, and a deadly paleness overspread his countenance, ‘say only the word, and it will not be.’

I looked in his face and answered, as I laid my hand in his, ‘If you do not fear, John, how can I?’

And so we were engaged.

I wandered with John Hervey through the grounds of Dene. I listened to the splash of the fountain, the scream of the peacock, the striking of the old clock, and the rustling murmur of the wind amongst the plantations ; but I thought not of the joys of my childhood, for the present was bright with the sunshine of an unclouded happiness. I stood with him upon St Anne's Hill, but I had forgotten my calm acceptance of life, my resignation to its cares, and indifference to its pleasures. The sea sparkled in the glowing sunset, and its glitter seemed the reflection of the gladness of my heart. The breeze floated by me, and bore with it the murmurs of a happiness which could never forsake me. The birds winged their way to their rest, and I thought that my rest had begun ; and when I gazed upon the tower of the ruined oratory, and turning to John reproached myself that I could so dwell upon an earthly joy, he answered, ' Ursie, the love which God blesses in its birth, can never know death.'

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

ONLY when I returned to Sandcombe was my mind brought back to the perception that life is, and always will be, probation.

People speak of forgiveness, as though it must necessarily imply entire forgetfulness. That has always seemed to me a mistake. We may cease to dwell upon an offence, but when it has revealed to us faults which we never suspected—when it has shaken our confidence—forgetfulness is impossible. New feelings may spring up, but the old can never return. I think Jessie opened her eyes but slowly to that truth, whilst Roger saw it from the beginning. He was at heart a brave man—morally brave—except perhaps when called upon to give pain to others ; and he allowed himself now no self-deceit, in a question in which the vital happiness of his life was involved. Jessie had disappointed him. He did not try to hide from himself the fact. He looked at it boldly—with what bitterness and self-reproach, what deep compassion and sympathy and tenderness, only God can tell, and only one who knew him as I did could imagine. His manner to Jessie was quite altered. It had lost the gentle flattering attention of the lover, and had become the

watchful, thoughtful guardianship of the father. Every want was provided for, every necessity foreseen ; but the hasty wish was checked, the fancy of extravagance reproved. It was his duty to train her, for he had chosen her untrained. Some of her faults might be called her own, but others were in a manner his, for he had himself placed her in a position for which she was unfitted, and then shrunk from insisting upon its duties. Now the task of instructing her was laid upon him. It struck me much how anxiously and conscientiously he entered upon this duty ; with what firmness, and yet what singular humility and self-distrust, never regretting or upbraiding, always bearing in mind that he had marked out his own lot, and that it was only God's great mercy and kind providence which had prevented it from being a hundredfold more bitter.

It was a very different married life from that which those who knew and loved Roger would have anticipated, for Jessie was not changed at once. That is another mistake which we are apt to fall into. We hear of striking events, a great shock of fortune, an alarming illness, some painful tearing aside of the veil of self-deception, and think that because great feeling is aroused great changes must follow. There may be—there often is—a great change of principle, but the work is carried on according to natural laws. Vanity, wilfulness, selfishness, faults which are the growth of years, it will take years to subdue. So it is that the true conversion of the heart in middle age will yet leave the hard lines of an indulged evil temper strongly and painfully marked. Jessie was willing to bear her discipline. She was humbled and penitent ; but the old self still remained, even whilst she struggled against it. My greatest hope of her attaining to strength of character was based upon her anxiety for her child. I remembered what Mrs Kemp had said about the way it sobers a woman to have little helpless things to take care of ; and I thought I could see the beginning of this steadiness and thought even now. In the prospect of my soon leaving her, she was continually talking to me about what was to be done when I was gone, and how she was to manage to bring up her child rightly—to be different from herself ; that was her great desire. But I did not entirely share that wish, neither I am sure did Roger. The old romantic love was over, but a new and more lasting appreciation of her good qualities was dawning upon him. Jessie, in her best moods, was very winning, and truly deserving of all the affection that could be bestowed upon her. At this

time especially, her unselfishness made me cling to her with a daily increasing affection.

I don't think either she or Roger gave one thought to themselves when they knew I was engaged to John Hervey, though the change came at a time when they could least of all spare me, and when both of them looked to me not only for help but comfort. I was never made to feel, either by look or tone, or even by a sigh, that my happiness was to be purchased at the expense of their daily ease; and yet they gave me all the affection which in my most exacting moments I could demand. It is often said that there is a great deal of ingratitude in the world, and no doubt there is; but I will never believe that if a person really tries to put self second, there is any lack of reward even on earth. I can say with truth that this had been my object, as I can also say with greater truth that I had constantly failed to attain it. Witness the way in which I took Roger's marriage. Now it seemed as though kindness, and consideration, and sympathy were actually showered upon me. I believe Mrs Kemp was only one degree less interested for me than she was for Mary, whose marriage was to take place about a month before mine. The cottage in which John and I were to live was very near Longside, and half Mrs Kemp's time was spent in arranging about furniture and alterations. She really took all the trouble off my hands. William did what I little expected of him, and certainly could not have asked; he promised to give me five hundred pounds on my wedding-day, and declared he should leave everything he had equally divided between Roger and me. With John's consent, I arranged to let Jessie have one hundred out of my five put aside for her at once. The question of her money had been a trouble to me from the beginning; and when both Roger and she objected, and said that William would not like it, John and I determined to have it settled upon the baby. I felt that I must begin my married life with a clear conscience about all such matters. I could not take William's money with the thought that Jessie had any claim upon it. I did not mean to let William know anything about it; but it did come to his ears, and he then said he would make the arrangement himself. This pleased me as much as anything that happened then. Not because of any saving to myself, but I was so thankful to see that he had a notion of restitution. As for the kindness of the friends in the neighbourhood, it almost oppressed me, I had such a number of good wishes, and such pretty presents. But what

pleased me most of all, I think, was a parcel from Germany, containing a note of congratulations from Mrs Temple, and a few lines from Miss Milicent, accompanied by some specimens of Swiss wood-carving, a salad fork and spoon, and a paper knife, and a very pretty dish to stand on the table in my parlour.

Mrs Temple's note, though short, helped me to understand the blessing of being 'in charity with all men.' As for Miss Milicent, her congratulations were so hearty that they made the tears come into my eyes; whilst I felt truly humbled by the thought of how little they were deserved. 'Dear Ursie Grant,' she wrote, 'you have been a good sister, and a good friend, and God's blessing is upon you, and be sure He will prosper you. I shall say a hearty prayer for you on your wedding-day, as I have done every day of my life for many years. People declare that the saints know what is going on upon earth; I don't pretend to judge upon that point, for never having been where they are, and there being nothing about it in the Bible, I should think it presumption to decide; but if my mother, who was a saint if ever there was one, knows anything about your plans, she will for certain give you her blessing on your marriage; and as we can't say surely, I send it to you for her, praying God that in all times of trouble, you may meet with a friend as true as yourself, and a greater good in an earthly way, I can't ask for any one. And so, good-bye,—and I hope before long to come back to England, and to see you and John Hervey at your cottage.

'From your most sincere and affectionate friend,

'MILICENT WEIR.

'P.S.—I should like to know what the rent of the Heath is now. I hear the house has changed hands. I have quite forgiven John Hervey, and think him a wise man, and worthy to be your husband. And I beg you will give him my good wishes, and tell him so.'

Time sped on so quickly, my wedding-day drew near before I seemed at all ready for it, though what remained to be done, concerned others more than myself. Roger wanted to make a list of things which it would be well for Jessie to attend to; he asked me to write down what I did with the servants in the way of teaching them, and what my rules were. He was bent upon having a strict, regular household; and Jessie tried very much to follow what I suggested. Of course I was obliged to make a

good many changes ; for with her baby to attend to, she could not possibly undertake all that I did ; and Roger was very considerate, not at all wishing to press her. What she could not do, he said, he would try to do himself ; and with this help I had no fears for Jessie.

She had many, however, for herself. We were talking together on the Saturday before my marriage, which was to be on the Tuesday following,—sitting in the deep window-seat in the parlour, the baby lying in my lap,—for, now the time seemed so short, I made Jessie spare it to me whenever I had a moment's leisure. It was a beautiful, calm evening, and the fresh scent of the mignonette and roses in the garden, and the myrtle which was trained against the wall, seemed quite to fill the room. Home seemed very pleasant and dear to me now I was going to leave it, and I said so to Jessie.

'O Ursie !' she answered, and tears filled her eyes ; 'how I shall miss you. Looking back ever so long, I have always depended upon you ; and I can't go to Roger for every little thing.'

'You must learn to do so,' I said ; 'he likes it, and he is never impatient.'

'No, never,—but,—Ursie,—I think a woman can understand one's foolish ways, and make allowance for them. I never feel afraid of owning how ignorant I am to you.'

'You won't be ignorant soon,' I said ; 'you are setting to work to learn so fast.'

'But it is too late to begin,' she answered, 'after one is married. If I could only go back ! Ah ! little one,' and she bent down to look at the baby ; 'you shall never be such a thoughtless lassie as your mother.'

'You never can remember your mother,' I said ; 'that makes a great difference.'

'Perhaps it is an excuse ; I don't know—I believe it was in me to be bad, Ursie. I always pray that baby may take after Roger, and not after me. I never like to hear people say she is like me.'

'There is no need for her to be so very different, dear Jessie,' I replied ; 'all that she will want will be more careful training than you ever had.'

'I don't mean to spoil her,' she answered.

'I am sure you don't. But, Jessie, may I tell you what my fear is ?'

‘Yes, speak out ; I don’t care what I hear from you.’

‘Well, then ! I am afraid you won’t begin training her soon enough ; and I think, too, that perhaps Roger will fall into the same mistake. He was inclined to indulge me when I was little.’

‘Would you have me scold her at once ?’ said Jessie, laughing, as she stooped down to kiss her baby. ‘You have a cruel aunt Ursie, little one.’

‘I think the training of a child, as far as obedience is concerned, ought to be over by the time it is five years old,’ I replied.

Jessie started.

‘Yes,’ I continued, ‘I know it sounds extremely cruel, but one thing I am quite sure of, that little things of that age will bear any amount of strictness,—of course I don’t mean unkindness,—but strict order and discipline as to obedience, so long as they have great tenderness shown them at the same time. Children, I believe, are actually taught to be disobedient by the folly of their parents.’

‘I don’t want obedience half so much as love,’ said Jessie.

‘You will never get one without the other,’ I replied. ‘Disobedience is selfishness ; and a selfish child does not properly understand what love means.’

‘And what is to be done after five years old ?’ asked Jessie.

‘I suppose good example,’ was my reply ; ‘a sterner discipline for one’s self than one would like to attempt with a child, great earnestness, and especially great calmness, and a ready sympathy and tenderness of manner.’

‘I shall not be wanting in tenderness,’ said Jessie ; ‘I shall love my little one too well for that.’

‘What I should fear most for myself,’ I said, ‘would be impatience. I know from experience that no amount of affection will do away with the effects of a hasty word. An irritable person can never gain confidence ; not that you are irritable, Jessie ; I was speaking more of what I remember in my own childhood. William, when he did pet me, was much more indulgent than Roger ; but I never felt sure of him, and so I never opened my heart to him.’

‘If my baby is to be taught by good example, there will be very little hope for her,’ said Jessie, ‘except that she has a father as well as a mother.’

‘I scarcely see how she is to be taught without example,’ I said. ‘I remember hearing Miss Millicent lecture the children

at Compton about reverence, talking to them in a loud voice in church, just as the service was about to begin. Naturally enough they all became irreverent directly; whereas one look at Roger was sufficient to make one remember where one was. And, Jessie, as to reverence, I cannot but think, if we mean to make a child reverent to God, we must begin by making it reverent to its father and mother.'

'Roger will do that,' said Jessie.

'Yes, I think he will; it is in him. But a great deal must depend on the mother. You know Mrs Kemp brought up Mary in that way. Many times I have heard her say, "My dear, you may take liberties with your companions, but you must never take them with me." Mary was obliged to come in and out of the room quietly, and to stand aside for her mother to pass; and was so particular about saying, "Thank you;" and everything her mother did for her was considered such a favour. It quite shocks me sometimes now to see children make slaves of their parents as they do, fancying that their only business is to please and work for them.'

'I should never have thought Mary Kemp had been brought up in that way,' said Jessie; 'she always gave me the notion of being so independent, and going her own way without contradiction. I know when Aunt Morris used to scold me so much, I used to think of Mary with envy, because it seemed as though she did just as she liked, and was never found fault with.'

'That was because there was no occasion to find fault with her,' I replied. 'Mrs Kemp declared that she never had cause really to scold Mary after she was fifteen. You see she had been brought up so well till then, that her mother was able to let the reins loose; and so, just when she was beginning to have a will of her own—as girls will have at that age—it was a right will which there was no occasion to oppose. I remember Mrs Kemp saying to me one day that what mothers frequently do is to spoil their children up to five years old, try experiments upon them up to fifteen, and then contradict them up to twenty, and by that time there is an end to confidence, and too often to love.'

'I should be afraid,' said Jessie, 'that all that kind of strictness would make a child so formal, and so afraid of its mother.'

'No doubt it will where there is no tenderness or sympathy,' I replied. 'But Mrs Kemp has such a very affectionate way with her, and throws herself so heartily into children's pleasures,

that they could not be afraid of her. As for being cold-mannered to children, indeed, it seems to me impossible, though I know people who are so upon what they call principle, thinking it right, they say, to teach self-control. As if children's affections could be destroyed by shutting up the natural vent, and as if they were not the very means God has given us to soften necessary discipline. I don't think myself one can be too affectionate to children if one is only strict at the same time.'

'Well, Ursie!' said Jessie, laughing, 'there is only one thing to be done that I can see: you must just go and tell John Hervey that I can't spare you, for I shall never bring up my child rightly without you.'

'I have been preaching, I know,' I said, feeling rather ashamed of myself; 'and I have no business to do so.'

'You shall preach to baby when she grows old enough,' said Jessie; 'I am sure it will do her the greatest possible good.'

'No, indeed,' I said, heartily; 'I hate preaching, I don't think any good is ever done by it.'

'Yes, you have done me good,' replied Jessie.

'Because you sought the preaching, as you choose to call it,' I replied. 'But, Jessie, if I had thrust it upon you, I should only have made you angry.'

'Still one must preach a little,' replied Jessie; or how is my poor baby ever to become what she should be?'

'Teach, but not preach,' I said; 'at least, to judge by myself, children like teaching very much, but preaching they can't endure. It makes them shrink like a sensitive leaf when it is touched.'

'And so my little one is to grow up like a heathen,' said Jessie, half smiling at her own exaggeration.

'So far as a baptized child, who is taught to pray, and read the Bible, and say its Catechism, and obey its parents, can be a heathen,' I said.

'But that is not all, Ursie,' said Jessie, earnestly.

'What there is beyond, must, I should think, be left to God,' was my reply. 'We can't give grace ourselves, you know, Jessie, and we shall never make it grow by searching into the heart to see if it is there. But I believe that the grace will never be wanting, if a child is kept in the way of duty and obedience, while we are at the same time thoroughly in earnest ourselves, and pray heartily for God's blessing and guidance.'

The good seed may not appear just in the way, or at the time we wish ; but it will ripen in due time, one may be certain.'

Jessie bent sadly over her baby. 'If I could only be sure,' she said ; 'but I have gone so far wrong myself. I often think that my punishment will be sent to me through my little one.'

'You must remember Roger,' I replied.

'Oh yes ! that is my comfort. A blessing must rest upon his child, Ursie ; don't you think so ?'

'I am certain of it,' I said.

'Baby is like him, the eyes are like, aren't they ?' continued Jessie ; 'she does not take only after me.'

I looked into the clear dark eyes, already beginning to dawn with something like intelligence, and fancied I saw in them the traces of the earnest, generous spirit, which had been my guide and support through life.

'If she was a boy she would be just like him,' said Jessie.

'But being a girl she is not at all like him,' said a merry voice. John Hervey came up to the window, and Roger with him.

'What are you two wasting your time about ?' asked John.

'Planning to make a wise woman of Roger's daughter,' I said.

John came round into the room. 'I don't believe she is a daughter yet,' he said ; 'or anything but an "it." Hand her over to me, Ursie. I seem scarcely to have looked at her.' I did as he bade me. Roger half sat, half leaned on the window-sill, gazing intently upon the baby's face ; presently he said : 'She is not a little Christian yet ; she will be to-morrow, please God ; but we have not settled upon a name for her.'

'Oh ! yes,' I exclaimed, 'you have. She is to be Jessie, of course, if you insist upon only one name.'

'Jessie won't have it so,' replied Roger, gravely.

'No ! why not ?' I looked at Jessie, and repented that I had asked the question. Her eyes were swimming with tears.

Roger put his hand upon her fondly. 'My little woman, why mustn't it be ? you see Ursie thinks it right.'

Jessie wiped away her tears, but still she answered : 'I can't, Roger, indeed, I can't have it. She must never be Jessie in anything.'

'Not if I wish it ?' he said.

'Not if you wish it. You don't understand now what Jessie is.'

‘I understand she is my darling little wife,’ replied Roger.

Jessie looked up at him with an expression of almost painful gratitude. ‘Not Jessie,’ she whispered, ‘but Ursula.’ And Roger turned to me, as I was standing close to him, and giving me one of those kisses which seem to concentrate in them years of affection, he joined my hand with John’s, and said, ‘It seems too much to ask for the blessing of a second Ursula Grant.’

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

NO one can expect me to describe my wedding-day. If I were to attempt it, it would not be like the reality, for in truth I had but a very indistinct consciousness of anything that was passing around me that morning. I remember only Jessie’s sweet smiles and tearful eyes, and Roger’s more than fatherly thoughtfulness, and William’s kindness, and much, much more that was good and pleasant from neighbours and friends; and above all, the one happy, honest-hearted, loving countenance, which was now dearer to me than all others. How I was dressed, how I looked, may have been a matter of consequence to others, it was very little to me. John was satisfied, and I cared for nothing else; and the dearest ornament which I wore was the moss rose bud gathered by him and given me in exchange for one which I had laughingly insisted should be worn in his button hole on his wedding morning.

If marriage is an awful thing to those whose merely look upon it, it is far too sacred and solemn to be described by those who actually take part in it.

Rather I would tell of my first arrival at my new home a fortnight afterwards;—the pretty gable-ended cottage, covered with creepers; the pleasant little parlour, ornamented with my wedding presents, and having casement windows that looked out upon a tiny bit of lawn; a large kitchen-garden, and a paddock beyond, in which two cows and a pony were feeding; the view from the arbour of Compton church and the ruined oratory on St Anne’s Hill, the soothing murmur of the sea, which had been familiar to me from infancy; and the pealing welcome from the merry church bells. The cottage was within reach of all I loved and

cared for. The bright evening when we first drank tea in it as our home, seemed the omen of a happy life ; and, God be thanked, it has not failed. I have lived to love and honour my husband every day more and more. I am the mother of three children, whom God has blessed with health and good dispositions. I have a competency for the present, and faith for the future ; and if I have known cares, and disappointments, and anxieties, they are but the lot of all ; and I trust that through God's infinite mercy, they are doing the work of training for eternity.

That is the thought which is now most often with me ; for years hurry on and bring with them the consciousness that one is hastening to the time when all these earthly blessings must be left, and God must be all in all. There are moments when I think of my husband and my children, and feel as though I could cling hold of life, grasping it with all my strength, that it should not be taken from me. Those are moments of temptation, the temptation of a happy married life ; but there are others when God gives me another and a holier feeling ; when I can place all in His hands, lying still before Him and waiting cheerfully for whatever may be to come, because I have learned not only to trust, but to love Him. I fear it is almost bold to say so, yet Mrs Weir often talked to me about it. It is a feeling which comes to me most often in the long summer evenings, when the children are asleep, and I am waiting for John to return from some business which has taken him to a distance. Then I often kneel and pray whilst the moon shines full into my window ; and the soft night breezes rise, seeming to wail for the world's sorrows whilst it sleeps. The deep sounds in the calm, awful light, might well make me tremble, even if they did not make me sad. But it is not so ; I can feel rest then, which I seldom do in the day—rest which is quite rest, which has no wish for anything but to remain rest. I know that I have God quite close to me, and I can say what comes into my mind and be sure that every word is understood. I can tell Him of my love for my precious earthly treasures, and yet feel that He, who knows my heart, sees that it is truth, when I say how I have longed all my life with a great, great longing to love some being quite perfect ; and how, now I have found what I wanted,—even Him who in His wondrous mercy gave Himself for me,—and can give all in return—all ; every wish and hope and joy, not wishing to keep anything back ; caring for those whom He has given me here, as He only knows,

but turning again to Him, oh ! with such a rush at my heart !—it makes the tears come, because it is so happy.

If God should give me that feeling when I am called to die,—death would be great joy.

But I must work for Him now ; and there is still much to be done, both for myself and others.

I see Roger and Jessie often. I think and believe they are happy ; not so happy as John and I—our lot is rare in its blessedness, and Jessie, gentle and affectionate though she is, can never fully supply all the needs of such a heart as Roger's,—yet so happy as to feel that they are journeying on the same road to the same home of peace. They have but one child. I sometimes am inclined to wish they had more, when I see what a pet she is ; and yet for myself I am quite contented, for I could never love another so well, and I should not wish to be partial. My own children are dear to me beyond what words can express. It would be folly to suppose that any other love could ever equal that of a mother ; yet there is a peculiar feeling connected with little Ursula ; a remembrance of the first moment when I held her in my arms and thought of her as Roger's child, that must always give her a claim upon my heart, with which no one else can interfere. Inherited love—the love that clings to the child because the parent has been dear—is a strong tie ; and the second Ursula Grant is far more gentle and loving and teachable than the first ever was or will be. Her uncle William is her great charge ; and she waits upon him with a devotion and thoughtfulness, mingled with much of her father's early piety, which are very touching ; and often I think that Roger is blessed, through his child, by seeing his brother gradually but surely brought to follow in the same good path which he himself has so long trod.

Farmer Kemp is growing old, but works as heartily as ever ; and Mrs Kemp is young again in the happiness of having a married daughter and grandchildren. Miss Milicent is settled at the Heath. Her father's death, which took place about two years after my marriage, relieved her of the claim upon her fortune, and she has now a small but sufficient income, which is managed oddly still, but far more sensibly than in days of yore. She is a busy and useful person, always having some plans of charity in her head, and occasionally much perplexing Mr and Mrs Richardson by her desire to carry them out. But she is not wilful as she was. Past lessons have not been forgotten, and

when she is very unmanageable, Mr Richardson generally applies to me ; and a little talk in our parlour, or a conversation on the sea-shore, whilst the children, of whom she is very fond, are picking up shells, and searching for Miss Milicent's 'creatures,' seldom fails to bring her to reason. It is not my own sense or eloquence which can affect her, but God's grace working through the remembrance of her mother. Truly, I often think to myself, 'the path of the just is like the shining light,' in more ways than one, for it is a guide through many a darkened way.

And Dene—the bright home of my childhood, the lovely spot in which my heart knew its earliest and most untroubled joy?—

Miss Milicent's prophecy has come true, it has followed the fortunes of her family.

I will describe it as I last visited it.

I walked over St Anne's Hill, and along the top of the down, but when I wished to descend the sloping green path, I found myself stopped by fences and ditches, for the end of the down was enclosed, and Dene was no longer accessible in that direction. I went down on the other side, and made my way at the back of the plantation, till I came to a gate opening into the direct road to Hove. It was barred and padlocked. I clambered over it, and went up to the house. The shrubbery was grown into a thick, dark plantation ; the broad road was green with damp ; the wood work of the stables, the coach-house, and the cottage was unpainted ; the clock was silent. A woman with a little child appeared at the front door, wondering apparently to see any living being. She told me that I might walk round, and I went to the little gate leading to the side entrance, and when I opened it found the path blocked up, and made my way by stooping amidst overgrown laurels to the front of the house.

No verandah was to be seen ; the work of the old carpenter, which had been the pride and ornament of the place, and the wonder of the neighbourhood, had vanished entirely ;—the plain, stone house stood in its bare desolation, with only the broad pavement before it. I turned to the lawn, once so exquisitely smooth and soft. It was fast becoming rank grass. Two straggling flower-beds were left, but without a flower to brighten them. The fountains had ceased to play, the ponds were nearly empty, the walks round the garden were so overgrown that I did not

attempt to pass by them, nor even to mount the steps of my favourite seat. In the inside of the house a few pieces of furniture still remained in the two sitting-rooms, making a mockery of comfort ; the bed-rooms were empty.

I asked the woman what was to be done with the place, and she told me that she believed it was to be sold to a stranger, and the house was to be pulled down.

Such is Dene now.

In a few years another and a grander house may stand on its site. Lovelier flowers and walks and fountains may then adorn it ; eyes more fitted to appreciate may look on it with delight ; and lips more eloquent far than mine may speak its praise. But to me Dene is gone for ever.

And the happiness associated with it, the rush of glee, the entrancing dreams, the thrill of wondering admiration !—Vain, indeed, would be the effort by any power of wealth and taste to recall that cloudless joy. It is to be found but in the blessed memories of childhood and the glorious prophecies of heaven.

THE END.

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